

THE ARGOSY.

OCTOBER, 1886.

LADY VALERIA.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHAT LIONEL DE CRESSY SAW IN THE CHURCHYARD.

"MR. PARAMOUNT wishes to speak to you, sir," announced Mrs. Goodliffe, with no good will, as she admitted her master on his return, late and weary, from the parish round that had occupied him from the time of his parting from Oliver Meynell. "And dinner has been waiting this hour," she added, despondently.

"It's no use asking Mr. Paramount to dinner. Bring some tea as soon as you can," Eustace suggested, passing on to the study. The severe air of distant politeness that the little old gentleman reserved expressly for his Vicar, had given place to limp dejection, relieved by a dash of defiance at intervals.

"I'm in trouble," he began, with a sudden effort. "I don't say it's of your causing, because I object to making a statement incapable of proof. I don't expect you to be sorry for it. I wouldn't come here to ask your pity for myself. I am aware that in your eyes I have been for long an inconvenient worm that must be crushed and trampled out of the way, and I make no objection. It's for my little girl I want your help. *She's* always been devoted enough to you to satisfy you, sir."

"Elsie? Is she ill? I am indeed sorry ——"

"Not in body. *She's* better and stronger than she has been for years. She can walk quite a distance now. It's her mind, sir, that's ailing; and as I'm of no account in her eyes, I've come to see what you can do. Maybe she'll tell you more than she will me," in a tone of angry suspicion, which the Vicar let pass.

"I wish I could help her. I wish Mrs. Damien were at home. It may be a case for womanly help and counsel, not for the interference of us clumsy, uncomprehending men."

"Maybe so. If my poor Emmy had lived—perhaps I haven't

been so careful of her as I ought. She's a good girl, and not a week ago was singing over her work like a little bird, and I—not being in spirits myself—was sharp with her, but she never answered back. She doesn't sing now."

"Do you think a little change or company ——?"

"When I said I'd get a holiday and take her away, she fell a crying and begged me not. I'm fairly at my wits' end." And the poor man rubbed his head distractedly.

"What has become of her friend—her fellow-lodger?"

"Mrs. Beltran? Gone away with her husband. They've been to see Elsie since, and had her to spend the day and go sight-seeing. It mayn't have been good for her; may have set her murmuring at her lowly station."

The Vicar might have asked some questions more, but that the door was flung open to admit de Cressy, followed by Mrs. Goodliffe, with her tea-tray, at sight of which Mr. Paramount would have risen and fled, had not de Cressy insisted on relating an astounding School Board anecdote which he was bound to hear and discuss. De Cressy was always solemnly exempted by the old gentleman from the commination pronounced by him on all the doings at St. Fridolin's—partly as being youthful and irresponsible—mainly on account of his connection with a firm which he held in the deepest respect. A relative of Meynell Meynell and Mott could not for certain go very far astray.

Lionel made a few remarks on yesterday's expedition, not feeling exactly satisfied as to his own share therein.

"Do you know if the Archdales stay long in town?" Eustace asked suddenly, thinking of entreating Hester's help for Elsie.

"I am not sure. Why, here is Miss Archdale!" and three surprised faces greeted Hester, as she tripped in, followed by Sir John.

She laughed merrily. "My visit is to Mrs. Goodliffe. Have you discovered your loss yet?"

The old lady looked up from her tray, which she was busily rearranging with extra tea-cups.

"Mine, Miss Hester? Why no! Law! If it isn't my rain-cloak! Why where *did* it come from? Then whose did I bring home last night?"

"You and my mother exchanged, it appears, but you left your purse in the pocket. Yes, indeed, there it is. Mother would not have slept to-night if I hadn't thought of coming here at once with it."

"Think of that! I *am* ashamed. I am indeed. You take sugar, Miss? And Sir John?"

Hester sat down by Mr. Paramount, speaking softly and kindly to him about Elsie, till he almost forgot that he was breaking bread in the house of his enemy; while Eustace wondered at the quaint turn of chance that brought him to share two meals in one day with the two people in all the world most unfriendly to him.

So they sat round the wide open window in the soft evening light, clear and warm, though moonless, talking or listening to de Cressy's account of the humours of the Foresters' Fête and the village concert, till Hester rose to go.

"I want to ask you something first," she said to the Curate, who was accompanying them to the door. "I will not detain you long."

Sir John lingered behind, and they stepped out together and passed through the churchyard gate.

"Jock overheard something he was not intended to listen to the other day. Something you said to Fräulein Klitz—about a friend of mine—Mr. Poynter. Do you mind telling me what it was?"

"Miss Archdale—I *couldn't*!— To think of your coming to ask me that question here, of all places!"

"Why here? And why is it something I may not hear? He is dead, I know." Her lips quivered and her eyes grew appealing. "You cannot have worse news to tell me."

It was not in de Cressy to resist her; he looked slightly embarrassed for a moment though.

"It was nothing worth telling after all—not to do any good that is—and you'll be only laughing at me, maybe, when you hear it. Fräulein Klitz didn't, but she's credulous and sentimental, and I couldn't help telling her; it came out somehow in our conversation the other night."

"What came out, and what makes you think I could do such a thing as laugh—*laugh*!" The word came out with a half-sob.

"It was this. That same night the poor fellow disappeared I saw him, Miss Archdale, as plainly as I see you, standing on these very flags, late at night, in the full light of the moon."

"Saw him—and you have told no one? The police——"

"Let me tell you how it was. You know at that time we had no thought of what was going to happen to him, of what *had* happened to him, I firmly believe. It was the night of our weekly practice here. Half-past seven to half-past nine—and a very good one it had been—there's a great deal of real musical talent going about here, believe it or not. Well, maybe we had stayed a trifle beyond our time, and it might be ten o'clock by the time everyone had gone, and young Rendall and I had put the things up and the room to rights, and turned the lights out. You see the gate over there"—pointing to the old archway in the far corner at the head of the little flight of steps—"that's supposed to be locked every night, but for the convenience of one or two of us it had been left open till the practice was over, and I sent Rendall across with the key to lock it. I stood at the window watching him, for it was as light as day, and as he disappeared by the west end of the church, I saw a figure come slowly round the east side. I thought it was some loiterer, and watched him, meaning to send Rendall after him when he came back. Then I suddenly recognised him. It was Mr. Poynter, though how I came to know it—or why

he should be there—I could not say. He crossed the churchyard slowly, his head bent, to that great stone you see under the plane-tree, and sat down."

"Why didn't you go out to him?"

"Why should I?" was the not unnatural answer. "I waited to see what he would do next. In a minute or two he rose and came on here, right up to the window."

"Oh!" Hester caught his arm impulsively. "And then?"

"He stood looking full into my face, Miss Archdale, with no more sight in his eyes than the dead. He might have been walking in his sleep, for anything he saw of me. I was just frozen to the spot for a minute, and then out I went after him. Just then round the church came Rendall, giving a shout as if the place were on fire, and I stopped to listen. When I looked round again I was alone."

"He had passed out of this gate, of course. Oh, *why* didn't you run after him?"

"Why should I? We didn't suspect anything wrong then, and that young donkey Rendall was in such a panic, it put everything else out of my head. Some of those little wretches of boys had filled the lock with mud, and he must needs force the key in and had bent the wards. I went off to get a locksmith I knew of to set it to rights, and the rest slipped out of my mind entirely, till Fraulein Klitz told me of the disappearance, and the trouble you were all in about it, on the Friday. She took it for a death-omen—what I had seen—and I began to think the same, till I felt ashamed to mention it. I'm as sure of what I've seen as that the church stands there. But it's another thing to swear to it in a witness-box."

Mr. Paramount had taken his departure. Sir John, accustomed to Hester's endless conferences on parish work, had lighted a cigar, and was philosophically waiting the conclusion of the interview, sauntering up and down under the poplar trees.

"Show me the place—the very place," Hester demanded, and they crossed to the great tombstone where Edric had once sat with Mrs. Damien in the golden moments for which he was to pay so dearly, traced his steps to the window, and on to the wicket gate beside the large one at the foot of the Vicarage steps.

"Come, Het, your mother will be getting anxious. We've had time to settle the affairs of all the distressed old women round St. Paul's. Good-night, Mr. de Cressy."

"Good-night, Sir John. I beg your pardon for detaining you so long."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE SPELL OF THE ROSE.

For the first time for many a day, except Sundays, Elsie's dark little corner in St. Fridolin's was filled on the Friday following her father's visit to the Vicar. She glided in, white and thin like a little shadow, as her father had said, but walking easily and without assistance, to the eleven o'clock service; and Eustace was glad to find her awaiting him in the porch afterwards.

She gave him a wan smile, and for once did not wait for him to speak first, but began with feverish haste.

"I beg your pardon for asking, but can you tell me where Mrs. Damien is now, please?"

"She was in Paris when I last heard, nursing an old friend, Lady Monchalsea. As soon as she got better they were going to Dieppe, and then for a month's cruise in Lord Monchalsea's yacht—I don't know where."

"A month!" she gave a sort of despairing little cry. "Not home for another month!" She raised a pair of great sunken eyes to his, and then turned away, her fingers twisting and working as if in struggle with some outbreak of distress.

"She was a kind friend to you. Do you want her so badly?"

"Oh, I want her! I want her! I was wicked and ungrateful when she left, and now I don't know what will become of me."

"Let me try to help you. I can see that you have been in great trouble, my poor child. Have you felt neglected. I thought you had some new friends to take care of you."

Out broke the storm at this—violent, irrepressible. She sank on the wooden bench where she and her friend had sat hand-in-hand, years and years ago it seemed, and sobbed and sobbed, begging the Vicar in gasps to leave her—leave her! She was an unhappy girl, and wanted to die. What did it matter if she did die there! Oh, if she only could!

"Elsie, you are saying a great deal more than you intend me to believe," he spoke sternly at last. "If you were half as bad as you declare, it would be my duty to fetch your father and find out all about it. Now stop crying, or I shall go for him at once." Elsie did stop for a moment, and tried to dry her eyes with her soaked pocket-handkerchief, but the sobs continued.

"Get up and take my arm." And without more ado, he walked her across to the Vicarage, where Mrs. Goodliffe was on the look-out for them.

"Pretty dear. Over-tired, is she? I've got some good news that will cheer her." And she took the girl into her kind old arms.

Eustace returned to the church to await the organist, with whom

he was to have a consultation on the possibility of remedying the defective bass of the splendid old "Father Smith." The close, weary summer was telling on him—or so he assured himself as he paced the aisle dejectedly—tired, oh! so tired of his life and its work. "It takes a happy man to do really good work," he was saying to himself. "One can give out to others only what one holds oneself. I am a failure here. De Cressy would make a better thing of it if he were a year or two older. Should I do better anywhere else, though? At Altcar? No. I cannot put myself in Randolph's place down there. It would be a false position all round. They don't want me, either. Does anyone?"

A step on the threshold, that surely he knew from a thousand. A flash of sunlight through the open south door, and up the aisle there sped with hurrying, elastic tread, as in joyous haste, a bright figure, with shimmer of silk and rustle of lace, and slim outstretched hands.

"Mrs. Damien!" he cried, and stood still in amaze, silent and unresponsive from very incredulity.

"Home again," she smiled into his face. "Yes, *home*," and her bright gaze flashed round the great dim spaces aloft, and smoke-darkened walls, as if she loved them. "Did you not think I should come here first?"

"You are *very* welcome," was all that Eustace dared say, and even then dreaded that the tremulous accent said too much.

"I came yesterday with a friend. He was in haste and so was I, once my face was set homewards."

"A friend——" He stopped himself, and she suddenly flushed hotly, and a smile danced round her lips.

"Not Lady Monchalsea, unluckily. She is still very ill, and I have promised to go back to her for some time—when my errand here was done——" And again she flushed rosily.

"You lost your holiday," he began, embarrassed, half angry, desperate to hear more. "I heard how you left your friends."

"Oh! I was so thankful, so glad to leave them all. It would have been wrong to stay, and I was at my wits' end for an excuse to go. We were all at cross purposes and very unhappy," she went on, half laughing, in incoherent explanation; "all blaming one another for what was nobody's fault, I suppose, though Lady Monchalsea will tell you I behaved atrociously," and her eyes dropped.

"Professor Montrose?" The name slipped out unawares, and he raged at himself inwardly.

"Don't speak of him," she commanded imperiously, raising her hand as if to stop his lips. "I cannot bear to hear his name made light of. Noble! Generous! I will honour him to my latest day. He was far too great and good to have been in our frivolous, silly set for an hour. Oh! how I *wish* I had never gone! Now, tell me about St. Fridolin's. My girls?"—shaking off the distasteful subject with a graceful gesture of her pretty head.

"One is in sore need of you—Elsie. The others are much as you left them a month ago."

"They had a happy holiday, I know, thanks to you." And then she stopped confused. "So they want me back? Not more than I want them. Ah! my place is *here*. I *am* needed by someone!" she declared, joyously. "Aren't *you* glad to see me?" she demanded, in pure gaiety, turning suddenly on him.

"Am I glad?" broke from his lips, and his eyes finished the sentence.

"Then, you *did* miss me? Just a little?" she went on, with dancing eyes, but the sweetest, tenderest tremor round her perfect lips.

"Miss her?" How could he answer? What words did language hold to tell his mighty heart-hunger for the joy of her presence; his greedy rapture over her looks, her words, that held him spell-bound, powerless to do aught but gaze and gaze?

She knew quite well—the witch—without need of look or sign.

"Then, you do care for me?" she asked, softly and shyly, putting her two hands out to him, ungloved, white, appealing.

"Care!" He gave one great sob, and for all answer dropped his lips on those delicate, tremulous fingers, holding them for one minute, one short minute, of wild delight.

"Then, why don't you say so?" and the hands were withdrawn in a flash, and she was standing before him, upright, saucily defiant, altogether adorable. Then, while the sound of her audacious words seemed still to echo in the grey height above, her colour suddenly rose, deepening from brow to chin, her great lashes quivered downwards, and in a second she stood before him, the shyest of drooping roses.

"Because I should say too much if I spoke at all! Because to tell you how I have missed you, how I care for you, would be to say more than you might choose to hear. Because I cannot stop half-way, nor tell you of my love without begging for yours in return, and that it is hardly fair to do," he broke out, hoarsely and low. "I have been seeing the grey, ugly, practical side of life, and I know how much more marriage means than the first hot fancy. If I thought that I could make you happy, not only now, but in the long years to come, *then* I would seek your love. Then I would never rest till I had won it. Now—dare I risk it?"

"But—if it were given unasked? But—if *I* dare risk it?" said a soft voice in answer, low, but perfectly clear and decided.

Eustace looked at her wonderingly, half despairingly, then caught her hands and kissed them again and again with hot passionate kisses, that seemed the real speech of his heart hurrying to contradict his half-hearted words.

"My Love, my Queen! It is for your sake I would bid you leave me."

"And yet you love me?" she queried, letting her hands rest in his, and laughing low in very fulness of contentment. "And you would not marry me, you say. And I am never to be told why?"

He might have dropped her hands, and taken advantage of the opening to tell her how he was trying to act for the best. How that long ago he had decided on his scheme of existence; and that pleasure and light words and sweet follies of love-making had no part therein, and that if love were to be admitted it was to be a severe and passionless sentiment, shared by some noble creature with a taste for self-sacrifice and a heart given to the most depressing work of the world; with whom he might tread the path of life, exalted alike above its pitfalls and its allurements. A most lofty, ascetic, and distinctly uncomfortable ideal; fortunately unrealisable. And here was he bound, heart and soul, at the feet of this smiling, pleasure-loving goddess, with her gay dresses and her worldly chatter, and no conceivable resemblance to the pale saint of his dreams, beyond the sweet voice and honest eyes. All that is what he *should* have considered had a chance been given him, but it was not; for the warm, slender fingers closed round his as he tried to withdraw them, and the great lovely shining eyes lifted themselves to his and held them fast.

"Tell me why?" her lips repeated.

Then it did come clearly to his mind that the saint would have accepted St. Fridolin's dirt and iniquities as the very crown and glory of the life he was offering her, while to this fair woman an explanation was due as to why it was not merely a preliminary to Altcar Court, and again his mind misgave him. Lastly there fell from his lips the very oddest answer ever given by man.

"Because I am not sure how much you love me."

She gave him one quick, fiery glance and dropped his hands as if his touch scorched her; then turned slowly away, her head perfectly erect, her teeth set deeply in her round red lip, and stepped softly down the dusky aisle.

Then he knew that for good or evil she carried his heart with her. "Rose!" he cried, and was at her side again. "Tell me ——"

"How can I tell you *anything*—if you *won't* ask me?"

There was an end of the matter. Out of the gloomy church they passed to the low south porch; and there the slanting sunbeams came and found them an hour later. The disappointed organist lingered, sending his great waves of music rolling and surging through the empty church and out over their heads unnoticed. De Cressy fidgeted in and out of the Vicarage in vain search, and two little girls, coming for Confirmation tickets, trotted away disappointed. No one thought of the south porch, where Eustace sat, with Rose's hand in his, pouring out his tale of trouble and doubt and would-be sacrifice, fully and freely, reading it all afresh by the light of her eyes. He

told her everything, and she dropped sweet little words of sympathy into his ear and bewitched one misgiving after another out of him, till he laid all plain before her.

"So it is for me you are afraid, after all!" she cried. "For me and St. Fridolin," with a gay little confident laugh. "I am not the sort of wife to bring home here! Oh, I quite understand your views, and if I did not want to marry you myself I should quite agree with them. I'm not one bit jealous of my shadowy rival—your ideal, Eustace—and never shall be. Don't you see, dear, what an immense advantage I possess over her?" stooping down as she stood beside him, and dropping her voice impressively. "Your saint, my dear, is non-existent, and—I am here!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"ON THE TRAIL."

"Oh, Rose, Rose! It's good to have you home once more! We've all been wearying for you. I could hardly believe my eyes when your note came to me just now. But must you really leave us again so soon?"

"I promised," said Mrs. Damien, with a regretful smile. "I cannot desert that poor old lady yet. I must see her safely through the cruise of the *Mallard*. Beatrix is no sailor. We must make the most of our time together. Come and take off your hat and begin at once. You're going to give me the rest of the day, of course."

"No, no! Don't tempt me. I've only an hour or so free. Mother is at Eastbourne, and I am in charge at home. Painters, plumbers, and decorators are to be turned loose on the premises next week; the rooms are half dismantled; Fräulein Klitz is in bed with a swollen face; the cook has gone for a holiday, and Daddy has asked the Tremletts to dinner."

Mrs. Damien laughed merrily at Hester's report. "Bring them all here," she suggested.

"I wish I could. Why!"—looking round in some surprise—"How long have you been home?"

"Since yesterday evening."

"And you have got into perfect order already! All your pretty things about, and the place full of flowers, as if you had been here for weeks."

Aunt Mamie here rose from her knees in a far-off corner, where she had been lending a last artistic touch to an arrangement of gold-striped curtain and hydrangeas in a dark red pot. She welcomed Hester with one of her gleaming smiles.

"What do you mean by all this splendour out of the season? You don't expect to have any visitors, do you? I thought *we* were

the last people left in town. Daddy, Fräulein, Jock and I play tennis in a howling wilderness every evening."

"De buds don't wait to ask de olminic what time to blow," Aunt Mamie replied, sententiously. "Heh, you dar, Mars Jock? S'pose you come 'long an' see what I got down b'low. I lef' some berries dar, I disremember 'xactly whar, but cryin' out dey was—jes *cryin' out fo'* some chillun to come 'long an' eat um."

Jock needed no second suggestion to slide off the chair on which Hester had posted him, and trot off hand-in-hand with Aunt Mamie. "You'll tell me a story," they heard him bargain.

"Good old Auntie. I think Lady Monchalsea will miss her more than she will me. I tried to persuade her to let me leave her in Paris, but she would by no means consent to my travelling alone with Lord Altcar —"

"Lord Altcar! Was *he* with you? I never knew you knew him. And in Paris! Why, *I* saw him on Monday!" Hester exclaimed, with a whole volley of notes of interrogation in her voice.

"That did not prevent him from being in Paris on Tuesday, and bringing me home with him on Thursday, and returning to Altcar again yesterday."

"But *why*? Oh, I know you told me in your note about 'special private business,' and I, politely, have not referred to the subject; but all the same I feel it is a dark mystery; and if you laugh and get so pink-cheeked about it, no sense of propriety shall prevent me trying to find it out. You never used to have secrets from me in the good old days."

Mrs. Damien's face disappeared behind her palm-leaf fan, and a very meek little voice protested, "I'm sure I'm quite willing to tell you everything you wish to know, if you'll only mention what."

"What took Lord Altcar to Paris, and what brought you back to London?" was the prompt response to this invitation.

"He came to Paris to ask me to marry his son, and I came to London to ask his son to marry me."

Hester collapsed utterly.

"Rose!" she cried faintly presently. "No, don't answer. Don't wake me. Let me dream it out. I've fallen asleep in this rocking-chair, you know, while you were talking. I won't tell my dream lest you should laugh at it. Dreams go by contraries, and I know when I'm awake that, though you believe in Mr. Stannard as a priest to an absurd extent, you hate him as a man as utterly as it is lawful for any Christian to do."

"Hester!" And Rose put down her fan to give a supplicating glance, and put it up again to hide her hot cheeks. "Don't laugh, please, dear; and don't be so astonished. I know quite well that I'm not the right woman for him to choose, but that's his affair; and if he won't be wise and give me up, what's to be done? Lord Altcar said that it was as certain that he loved me as that he never would tell me so, unless I asked him. What could I do?"

"It's very creditable to Lord Altcar's penetration to have found it out, considering that his opportunities of seeing you together were limited."

"Why! It was *you* who told him so! You false, treacherous girl!" And Rose dropped her fan and leant forward to seize her friend's wrists. "Look in my face, and deny it if you dare. Lord Altcar said that he had long known that his son's affections were engaged."

"I'm sure he didn't put it in that stupid, old-maidish form."

"Well, perhaps he said 'Devoted heart and soul.'"

"That's better."

"But he could not discover to whom till you enlightened him."

"I *never, never* did any such thing! He came and talked so nicely to me that afternoon about St. Fridolin's, and drew me on to tell him all I could about his son's work there. We were sitting with Lady Altcar in the evening while the others were at the fireworks, and he *wouldn't* be referred to Mr. de Cressy; so, as you and the girls are all I know anything about, I talked about you. I said nothing more than the whole parish knows—that I'll swear. Yes, I *did* give him your address in Paris before we left."

Rose did not look altogether implacable. "We have all three fallen victims to the craft and guile of that wicked old man somehow, I suspect. He lit the match and ran away from the explosion this morning; but is coming back to-morrow to stay at the Vicarage. Eustace (Hester had to think for a minute who that might mean) has written to suggest that he shall bring Miss Liddell with him to introduce her to me, and I shall ask her to stay here till Monday. I want you and Sir John to dine here to-morrow, unless you are too incensed with Lord Altcar to break bread with him. On Monday we are all going to Altcar, to Eustace's mother. I wish it was over. Suppose they don't think me good enough!"

Hester laughed and protested, and then the two fell into a happy, idle, disjointed talk, half mirthful, half sad; not with "the sadness of pain," but that which "resembles sorrow only as the mists resemble the rain"—a lingering regret for the good days past, even in the greater brightness of the days that had come—had come to one of them, that is. Hester, even in her unselfish delight in her friend's happiness, felt that all her little whimsical fancies about being superseded and left out in the cold had become grim realities; soften the fact as she might. Even sympathy with her own troubles was denied her. She could not bring herself to name Edric and the dark shadow that hung over his fate to Rose in the midst of her new joy; and yet, beside it there seemed little that could befall in the world of consequence.

"What have you been doing all this time?" Rose asked, in her turn. "You are thin and tired-looking, Hester."

"It is the usual town look. Everybody seems the same just now. You were worse off in Paris, were you not?"

"Never mind me any more. I want to talk about you. How is the picture going on?"

"Very well. I want one more sitting and then Jock's penance will be over. I can do the figure from a model. I shall be able to make studies for the background next month, if we go to Scotland. Papa doesn't seem able to tear himself away from town while a creature remains in it that he can meet at the club. I don't mind. One place is as good as another."

There was a sound of dull hopelessness in her words that made Rose look enquiringly at her. "I'm sure you are not well, dear. How I wish I hadn't to leave you here. Will you come back with me?"

"No, no! It can't be done. Now I must go. I shall not see you before to-morrow evening, then?"

"Hardly. I went to see poor little Elsie this morning, but she was lying down to get rid of a headache. I must go early to St. Fridolin's and see if she will come for a drive, perhaps bring her home to luncheon; and in the afternoon I must go to meet Miss Liddell. Till eight o'clock then, to-morrow."

They descended together in search of Jock, whom they found in Aunt Mamie's own special pantry sitting swinging his heels on a table, while Aunt Mamie, hard at work with her gauffering irons, was setting the frills of one of her marvellous caps.

"Tore him all to bits?" they heard him ask, with intensest enjoyment.

"Ebbery mossel. Not nuff lef of him to fill a walnut-shell coffin."

"And his bones?"

"Cracked um, an groun um all to powder."

"And drunk up his blood out of a calabash? Just as he said he would. Jolly!" And Jock's boots gave an appreciative flourish. "Hester! you should just hear this. Aunt Mamie's stories are prime. Won't you tell her one? Did you ever hear of a Ju-Ju house? It's a place where some people go to church (I wish we did), with elephants' tusks, and crocodiles' skins and teeth and skulls and all sorts of jolly things in it. 'Come home to tea'? What do we want with tea?"

A plate with a pile of strawberry hulls on it, an open pot of preserved ginger, some flakes of pastry and a general blissful stickiness overspreading the young gentleman's countenance sufficiently explained this indifference to life's grosser needs; but Hester was inflexible, and carried him off.

"Isn't Aunt Mamie fun?" exclaimed Jock in ecstasy as he capered along homewards beside his sister. "Hester! Do you think I may go and stay with her to-morrow and Sunday? I was to ask mamma—oh, she's not at home; well, you and Fräulein can give me leave. I'll let you paint me as much as you like all the morning if you will. She'll take awful care of me, she says, and I'll see that

she goes to church on Sunday. Say 'Yes, you may,' Hester, there's a good old thing!"

"We'll see what papa says this evening. If he says 'Yes,' you may go: don't let her frighten your wits out with those horrid stories of hers, though. I wonder how you can ask her to tell them."

"I tell you they're jolly. Fräulein knows some good ones; Wehrwolves and Black Huntsmen and wicked barons, but they're nowhere beside Aunt Mamie's. Bears and snakes and witches and ghosts—real good ones. I'll tell you about the ghost at the Endicotts—that was her old family, you know—to-morrow while you're painting, if you'll remind me. A sensible ghost—not like that stupid old thing of Mr. de Cressy's. That meant nothing."

Nothing! It meant a haunting shadow over one life at least; so Hester told herself, with a sudden pang. A grim secret terror that never left her side for an instant. It rose with her in the morning, walked beside her through all the day's duties, and that very night laid a sudden cold clutch on her heart at some casual words of her father's.

"Het, I forgot to tell you. I sha'n't go down to Eastbourne next week, I think. You may start Fräulein and Jock off on Monday without waiting for me. The Royal Denbigh are to embark on Wednesday. Wouldn't you like to come down to Portsmouth and see them off? I must go. I wouldn't miss being there to say 'Good-bye' to them on any account. You won't come? You aren't half the girl you used to be, Het. I wonder if we shall see that boy Poynter there. I'd give a hundred pounds to have him turn up in time. It would be the only thing to save him. Amongst us all we might pull him through, then; if he doesn't, I don't know how it will go with him. How white you look. Go to bed, little girl. Good-night."

Jock secured his father's permission, and was in a high state of good spirits and amiability when he presented himself in the studio next morning. Fortunately for Hester, he required no special amusement during the sitting, but entertained her with the whole of Aunt Mamie's legends, beginning with the headless dog that attended the Endicott family, and ending with a peculiarly ghastly and gory story of a hunt of a murderer through a swamp, personally conducted by the murdered man's ghost.

"And the dog was a regular man-hunter!" he explained, with much gusto: "trained to catch negroes. And what do you think, Aunt Mamie says Roswal is just that sort. A Spanish bloodhound, a man-hunter! I wonder if Roswal has ever tracked anybody down and torn him limb from limb?" he went on, with thoughtful enjoyment. "Don't you wish Mr. de Cressy had had him the other night?"

"Why, Jock, Roswal has never been out of our house since he was born. How could he ever learn to do such dreadful things?"

"But his father might have done, and I dare say he knows how to, all the same. Now, if Mr. de Cressy had only laid a bit of the blood-stained clothes ——"

"But there weren't any blood-stained clothes. Do keep your head still for a moment!"

"Well, his glove then. Lay it on that old tombstone, and hold tight to the leash while he dashes forward to the spot where the murderer is lurking in concealment—that's what I should do."

"I wish you'd try and fancy yourself the murderer a little; and look as if you thought he'd got you. Now tell me another story, and keep as still as you can for five minutes; then I shall have done with you."

Hester finished her work and saw Jock off to St. Maur Road in high glee; visited Fräulein Klitz in bed, and brewed her a fresh poppy-head fomentation; ordered the dinner for Sunday, and then set herself to live through the long, lonely, haunted day as she best might. She generally found work in plenty for her active little fingers, but to-day it would not last out the morning, somehow. A card came round from Mrs. Damien: "Cannot come to see you, as I expect Miss Liddell early. Have seen Birdie. Unsatisfactory;" and on it she pondered as she paced the quiet, half-dismantled rooms, with Roswal's big head under her hand. She did not care to go out aimlessly alone, even if she had not known how much her mother disliked her doing so.

It recalled somehow the day when Rose's departure was decided on, when she, in a fit of restlessness, had started for St. Fridolin's, to Elsie, with such scant results. Then, with the remembrance back came the shadow closer and blacker. "Do you remember," it seemed to breathe in her ear, "what you missed by going that day? Do you remember your foolish mistrust and anger? How you crept off to the church to give way to your fit of self-made misery? Your jealousy of poor little Elsie?" Hester pressed her hands to her ears, as if there were a veritable voice sounding there.

"I'll go there again," she suddenly decided. "I don't know why, but I feel it will be better for me to be there than anywhere else. Mother doesn't mind that. I'll go and wait in the church till evening. I shall be home long before it's time to dress. Roswal, you must be content with Markham for the rest of the day."

Roswal had no intention of doing any such thing; but, like a wary dog, he let himself be sent into Sir John's study, where he flopped down, with ostentatious obedience, while Hester shut the door; and, her footsteps once out of hearing, sprang through the window and made his way through the kitchens to the front area. There he lay low, till, as he expected, a cab made its appearance with Markham on the box. He watched Hester enter, and then whisked out and followed at a discreet distance till he knew it was safe to proclaim himself.

"Ugh, you brute!" as Markham spied him with disgust. Hester resigning herself to the inevitable, ordered the cab to stop and admitted him, expressing herself strongly; while he crawled in, and dropped at her feet, with a hypocritical air of self-abasement.

"Well, all you've got by this is that you'll have to be shut up in the Vicarage cellar till I want you; or else go home by Underground

with Markham." Roswal lifted first his head deprecatingly, and then one paw, which, after one or two purposeless flourishes, he dropped on Hester's knee.

"Oh, Cuss, do you remember what a bad dog you were last time we came here?" she cried, with a laugh that was half a sob; and Cuss blinked appreciatively. They alighted at the Vicarage, and Markham departed, with instructions to return in the evening for his young mistress. Before visiting Mrs. Goodliffe, Hester paused, attracted, as she always was, by the stillness and solitariness of the grey, bare churchyard; and, half involuntarily, sauntered through the open wicket. The windows of the Parish Room were open, and somebody was sweeping and arranging things inside. She thought of de Cressy's story, and shivered.

"Cuss! If it had been you who had been there," she exclaimed impulsively. "What *could* you have done, old dog?" Some chance reminiscences of Jock's anecdotes flashed across her mind and made her start. "*Could* you have traced him, do you think? Is there any truth in such stories?" Her cheeks began to burn, and her eyes to shine with a sudden, wild notion.

"Come here," she cried, and walked across to the great tombstone. "Who was here, Cuss? Can you find him?"

Roswal obediently began to examine the stone and all around with an affectation of extreme care, casting about in his sagacious old head for his mistress's possible meaning.

A scent a fortnight old is not a hopeful one—even if ghosts *do* leave any trail; but he searched nevertheless with much inward perplexity and searchings of mind. He decided at last that Hester was minded to revive an old game of her youth, in which he and she were to be lost together, and he was to triumphantly discover the lost track and bring her home, with many barks and tail-wagings. Following up this happy notion, he forthwith nosed out a path direct from the tombstone towards the Vicarage, and invited her to accompany him thereon. They paused at the window of the Parish Room, as in duty bound (they having stopped there on their way); then on through the wicket gate, and so along the quiet little street to the point where they had left the cab. Here he wagged his great tail and awaited further instructions, while Hester, who had watched his movements with feverish anxiety, stopped discouraged.

"Is that all, Cuss? Can't you tell what I want? Oh, I know! I ought to show you something of his, and I have nothing—nothing—only this."

It was Edric's letter, the one he had written in sore disappointment at missing her on the very day that she had been recalling; the day she made the grand blunder about the Professor, and everybody's troubles began. She had read it; poring over each blunt, inartfully constructed sentence; and had thought over the queer story it contained till her head grew dazed, without perceiving in it the

slightest clue that might warrant her disregarding Edric's humbly hinted wish for the matter to be considered confidential.

"Why should I have told anyone, and whom?" she argued with herself. "Daddy could not help me, and mother would be terrified at the mystery. I wish I had consulted Mr. Stannard at first, but I do not see what he could do more than apply to the Meynells, and that he has done already."

She called Roswal back to the tombstone, and then drew the letter from its envelope and let him smell it. "Find him! Find him, good dog," she begged him urgently.

Roswal had dim recollections of a letter entering into some performance in the days when he was a puppy and supposed to be capable of learning tricks. His wrinkled old face grew keen, his eyes sought first the letter and then Hester with intensest desire to comprehend her plans. Then he smelled everything carefully all over again, round and round in a widening circle. Then he stopped, threw his head up, and gave a sudden deep-voiced bark.

"You have found something. Oh, good Roswal, what!"

Roswal *had* found something—an idea!

He was to take Hester somewhere he was sure—but where? Somewhere that he knew, of course. Nobody expects a dog to do more. He saw it wasn't to the church, or the Parish Room, or home again, and he felt he had exhausted the resources of St. Fridolin's, till a sudden inspiration seized him. He had yet one more association with the place. "Come along! I have it!" And, with a confident air, he made straight for the old resurrection gate, his mistress keeping pace with eager steps; and then, once down in the little crooked alley, made straight as an arrow for Lavender Row.

"Here, why *here*?" Hester exclaimed to herself. There seemed something ominous in this retracing of her footsteps; but Roswal led on, right up to the door, open as usual, and at the top of the three low steps stood and waited.

Hester entered with uncertain tread and knocked, but faintly, on Elsie's door. There was as faint a response from within, and she turned the handle. The room seemed empty at first, and silent, except for the noisy tick of the tall clock in the corner. The old, well-polished furniture stood in dreary orderliness around the walls, and Elsie's couch was vacant. Venturing a step further in, Hester heard a slight movement, and saw Elsie crouched on the floor at the couch-side, resting her face against the cushions, as if in pain.

"Come in!" she cried. "What is it?" Then she turned a little white, scared face round, and, raising her dulled, woeful eyes, beheld Hester. She scrambled to her feet, and stood steadying herself by one frail, shaking hand on the table's edge.

"Are you ill?" Hester asked, startled into forgetfulness of her purpose by the change in the girl, and advancing with outstretched hand. "What is the matter? Can I not help you?"

Elsie's face had grown small and peaked, and her eyes glowed unnaturally brilliant out of two great, dark circles. Her lips looked hot and fever-dried; and, as she tried to answer Hester, a little hectic spot burned in each white cheek.

"I am not ill," she said, speaking hoarsely and ungraciously. "What can I do for you, Miss Archdale?" And her tone seemed to require an explanation of the intrusion.

Hester felt checked and discomfited, as she had done before, and by the same unaccountable consciousness of defiance and mistrust on Elsie's part. She drew back embarrassed, especially when the sense of her position returned upon her. Roswal stepped slowly in, and leaned against her for approval. "I came ——" she hesitated: then, struck by a sudden thought, went on more freely: "I want you, if you will, to tell me what news you have had from your brother?"

"We have heard nothing for a long time. The regiment was to move directly, when he last wrote; he has been too busy, I suppose." She spoke stiffly, almost sullenly. She had been longing herself with fierce anxiety for some word from him on her own account, and had ragged or sickened with disappointment at his silence, day after day. She was in no mood to give gracious replies. "I will get you his last letter, if you wish to see it."

She walked away to the old-fashioned, brass-bound work-box in which she kept her treasures, Hester watching her with pained curiosity. There was a change in her in more ways than one. In her dress for one thing. Instead of her usual little print gown, with its trim white frills, she wore a silky summer material; soft-toned and quietly made, but, to any woman's eyes, representing the price of a dozen cottons or serges, and the slipper that peeped from under its skirt was delicate kid, instead of stout-soled leather.

"Here is the letter," in a tone that said distinctly, "Take it and go!"

A glance at the date showed Hester that it could tell her no fresh news. "Then you have heard nothing since?—I mean, of Mr. Poynter?"

Elsie clasped her fingers suddenly and strained them across her breast. "Why do you come to me for news of him?" she demanded, in a high, unnatural tone. "What have I to do with you or your friends?"

"Forgive me!" Hester pleaded. "It was by a wild chance that I came here—from the place where he was last seen on earth. We have followed his footsteps to this house, and I ask of you—which of you who dwell here was the last to see him before he passed away from amongst us all?"

Her voice was quivering with excitement when she began to speak, now it broke suddenly. Elsie continued to hold her with a strange, fixed, unresponsive gaze. "I can tell you nothing," her lips formed almost silently.

The two girls faced one another for an instant longer. Hester's face eager, tremulous, disappointed, mistrustful. Elsie's a blank. She kept her fingers tightly clasped, ignoring Hester's proffered hand, and hardly bending her head in farewell.

"Good-bye! I am sorry if I have offended you. Come, Roswal!" And the door closed on her.

"What does it mean?" cried Hester, laying her hand on Roswal's tawny forehead. "Oh, Cuss, what is she hiding from us? And why does she hate me so?"

A bill-sticker swinging his paste-pot came along. The police, excited to some last exertions before the withdrawal of the reward, were strewing bills broadcast over St. Fridolin's district. Farther on, a figure in the well-known blue and red was hurrying along with a handful of letters for Lavender Row, and the top one of the pile bore a direction in Sampson's handwriting.

"What does she mean?" Elsie had cried, sinking on her couch when she was once more alone. "What does she know? What does she suspect me of? Only one night more! I cannot be mistaken. Oh! It could not have meant that it was through her that the tidings were to come to me."

Struck by a new terror, she raised her head, and gazed blankly out at the dun, frowning wall before her window. The bill-sticker was at work making bold and rapid flourishes with his brush across a bill, on which, over his shoulder, she read unheeding of the sense:

"MISSING! £100 REWARD;"

and before she could take in the rest, came the postman's knock on her door.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"PECCAVI!"

MR. PARAMOUNT, walking briskly homewards a few minutes before his customary hour, stopped within sight of his own door indignant at the appearance of a white parallelogram flaunting the smoky umber of his usual out-look, in defiance of the shadowy legend "Bill-stickers Beware" that adorned the top left-hand corner of the wall; still legible if you knew where to look for it. He raised his neat umbrella and would have proceeded to execute judgment on the offending placard forthwith, when the sight of a name in big capitals arrested his upraised hand, and with the other he hastily perched his glasses on his nose, with an exclamation of dismay.

"*Missing. Mr. Edric Poynter! Since the thirty-first of July.*—Absconded, eh?"—with a gloomy nod—"a lesson to Sampson. Well, well, I'm sorry, too. He was a pleasant, gentlemanly youth. '*Height, five feet eleven, fair complexion,*' that's him. '*Information to be given*

to *Meynell, Meynell and Mott.* Dear, dear, that's serious. I wonder if Elsie knows?" And he trotted indoors to convey the news.

No Elsie was to be found, however, either in the parlour or in her own little room, and depositing a huge roll of papers on the table, he went off to exchange his office-coat for the more ancient suit retained for home wear. When he came back, Mrs. Ridge was busy laying the table for tea. "No, I haven't seen her," she answered him. "I thought perhaps some of her West End friends had called for her and taken her out. Mrs. Damien's back, and a good thing too, say I. There's ladies that is ladies, and she's one of them." The slap with which the good woman applied a lump of butter to the loaf she was cutting expressed so strongly that she had something to say on the converse side of the proposition that Mr. Paramount was moved to enquire: "Who else are you alluding to, Mrs. Ridge?"

"I name no names," with a nod indicating that she could if she chose; "and far be it from me to cast a word up at poor little Elsie; yet foreigners *will* be foreign, and living for months like the birds of the air, with no cooking to speak of, and next week in a carriage and pair, is not *my* view of what's right and respectable." And, with a significant nod for the conclusion of this dark saying, Mrs. Ridge bustled off to fill the teapot at the kettle, to which a neighbour was kindly "lending a boil up."

Mr. Paramount was anxiously pondering out the "bearing of these observations," as alarmed and mystified as she could desire, on her return. "Is there anything wrong? Anything that I ought to be told? About those friends of Elsie's?"

"I make no insinuations. I only say that if—as I was given to understand—the Beltrans have left England for Continental watering-places, why, good riddance and no loss to anybody, and as to fretting after them, don't you give it no encouragement, like a sensible man."

Then with a last artistic touch to the plateful of radishes balancing the pickles on the other side of the dish of cold beef, Mrs. Ridge departed, leaving Mr. Paramount to digest her exordium with his tea as he best could.

Despite the disquiet she had succeeded in arousing in him, his enjoyment of the tea and radishes, and most engrossing of all, the contents of the parcel of papers which he opened and read as he eat, he found his thoughts going back perpetually to the handbill outside. "I wish I could find him—for his own sake as well as the reward," he thought. "It can't be a case of embezzlement, surely! A fraudulent bankruptcy? I shouldn't have believed it of him. Most extraordinary that it should have come under my eyes just now." And dipping a radish into his salt, he turned again to his paper.

It was a journal of ancient date, with a full account of a forgotten Ritualist prosecution; and Mr. Paramount plunged into it with much zest, stopping now and then to mark a point here and there. When he had finished one paper he took up another.

"It's *most* extraordinary," he repeated. "That young man was the first to turn my thoughts in this direction. 'Go and look at one,' he said, and there has not been a Sunday since that I haven't been to two or three. I've been the round of their Sundays, Dailies, High and Low, Festival and Mission services. I've seen the worst. If there's no law in the land that can stop some of the goings on that I've been a witness to, then it's clear we at St. Fridolin's have no case whatever. He'll get a verdict. There's no denying it—and I don't care if he does."

He poured out and swallowed another cup of tea—a cold one, for he had neglected to cover the pot—and took up his papers again.

"Where can Elsie be?" he wondered. It was very forlorn and comfortless without her. Would Mrs. Ridge come in and take away those tea-things, or must he sit with them under his eyes till Elsie returned? He hovered about unsettled and uncomfortable, with no place to sit down to and spread his papers out. At last he cleared a corner of the table and resumed his studies.

"We've *no* case!" he repeated, pettishly. "I won't be put into a witness-box and be made to cut a ridiculous figure just to gratify Bowles and Garraghty. They may show up *them* as much as they please, and I dare say they will. Why, it might injure me with the Firm, and I should never hear the end of it from young Mr. Ebden—and the others all take their tone from him."

He got up and wandered restlessly in search of Elsie. No trace of her in her little bedroom, where the old man lingered awhile, looking round the shabby, comfortless den, so carefully kept with its few poor little scraps of adornment. There was her mother's picture, a steel-grey shiny daguerreotype, which had to be unhooked and held at an angle before any trace of form or feature was visible, except where the brooch and gold chain had been lavishly begilt. Sampson hung, red-coated, velvet-framed, in spick and span newness, a handsome soldier-like figure, from which the old man turned with an impatient "Pish!" and beside him a list of services at St. Fridolin's. On the meagre toilet-table stood the old watch-stand, with his dead wife's watch in it—run down. He took it up with an injured feeling and wound and set it carefully, touching the little silk watch-lining on which his Emmie had proudly embroidered her initials the day after he gave it her, with a forget-me-not wreath. The paper was dropping from the damp walls; the ceiling black with age. He looked at the pinched and spare little bed and at the crazy furniture. "A poor place for a delicate child like Elsie," he said to himself, shaking his head sorrowfully. "But she never complained or asked for better."

Were the quaint corner cupboard and the rickety chest of drawers as poorly replenished within as the rest, he wondered? He tried one drawer. It was locked, but a shake jerked the paltry bolt out of its worn groove, and he peered in curiously. There were some tidy, scanty, piles of underlinen, and at one side, carefully wrapped round

with soft paper, lay a handsome lace handkerchief for the neck, and underneath it a showy painted leather glove-case, with gilded mountings, strongly scented with "Sandringham Bouquet." He touched and gazed with strong repugnance. How came these here, these showy, costly gewgaws, so unlike the rest, so unlike Elsie? He opened the case. Inside were half-a-dozen gloves of different tints and extravagant length. He snapped the lid down angrily, and returned moodily to the deserted parlour.

"It's a fine thing to me to profess to manage a parish, isn't it?" he asked himself, bitterly. If I make no better hand of it than I do of my own house ——" Somehow the usual resource of holding the Vicar accountable for all things evil that befell would not serve tonight. He picked up his papers, impatiently. "We've no case," he kept on repeating. "The suit is as good as given against us, if ever we let it begin. It's not too late. Bowles and the rest may go on at their own risk. I've done with it," rolling up the papers into a bundle, "and I'll see Garraghty this very evening and tell him so, and I wish that 'Blue Dog' had been burned to the ground before I ever set foot in it," he ended, viciously. "Yes, I'll give them fair warning and then ——" He was walking excitedly up and down the parlour now, and speaking half aloud. "Then, I'll go straight myself to the Bishop and withdraw the whole Memorial. I will! I'll explain my position to the Bishop and put myself right with *him*, whatever happens. It's the straightforward and manly thing to do, and Bowles and Garraghty may swallow it or not!" Even in his unhappiness there was a gleam of comfort in the thought of making things unpleasant, from perfectly pure and exalted motives, to his quondam associates of whom he had long ago sickened.

The heat of his determination carried him through the process of dressing again to go out. Some thought of Elsie's possible return checked him on the threshold, as he sallied forth. "Why, it's Saturday!" he exclaimed. "Where are my wits! She's at her lecture, of course. And Mrs. Damien is home again too. Of course she'll be there." And he went his way with a lighter heart.

When he had gone, a door opened softly on the upper floor, and from the empty, shut-up room that the Beltrans used to occupy there stole a trembling little figure and crept step by step down the broad staircase. She had spent hours, each holding a lifetime of agony, there in her loneliness. Lying on the bare, dusty boards clutching Sampson's letter with its fatal tidings to her breast, choking with strangled sobs, biting her fingers cruelly to keep back the hysteric shrieks that struggled to break forth, till, spent with the struggle, she lay still from exhaustion, and for a few moments hoped she was dying, till a sudden stab of pain wakened her to life and anguish once more. She had rushed up there for quiet when the first sentences brought home the meaning of Hester's words to her; and kneeling at the half-opened window, she read with catching breath and half distraught brain; till,

as she stood gazing blankly out in incredulous horror, there before her she read the ghastly confirmation of the story. The great black letters showed plain enough across the road. They were seeking for him then, and the search had led them there; and under this second blow she fell to the ground as one dead.

She could not measure the time she laid there senseless, any more than she could that of waking torture that followed. She heard her father's footsteps below and kept silent, locked in with her misery. One idea now possessed her; the thought of Mrs. Damien. "I must go to her and tell her all," she said over and over again, as she crouched silent, listening for a chance of escape. She heard her father leave the house and stole out and down the stairs. It was still early, not more than eight o'clock, and, except in Lavender Row, a bright evening. She dressed mechanically, counted the money in her purse, and made her way out of the house.

She thought she knew how to make her way to Mrs. Damien's. Her father had taken her there once before, and she had driven many a time to the house with her kind friend. She must go first to the Mansion House Station to-night and take the train. She took a wrong turning to start with in her preoccupation, and had to ask her way back through miles—it seemed—of unfamiliar streets. There was a crowd at the station that terrified her, and when she at last got to the ticket place, all recollection of the station she was to ask for had gone out of her mind. "St. Maur Road," she said, desperately.

"No such place on this line," said the ticket-clerk, with pardonable sharpness. "Now, pass on."

"I mean out near Kensington," she feebly persisted.

"All right." A ticket and some change were pushed over to her, and she moved on.

There was another crowd and a worse one on the platform, and Elsie, jostled and frightened, but for the sharp spur of her purpose would have turned back weeping. The train, when it did come, was crowded and she ran from one door to another searching in vain for a seat. A fatherly-looking old man beckoned her and helped her in at last, and she crouched down beside him, shaking in every limb. She took courage after a time to show him her ticket and ask when she was to get out.

"Kensington? That's two—three—five—yes, *five* stations off. I don't go on so far. Don't get out at South Kensington by mistake" (which, if she had done so, would have been the very best thing for her). He left her soon after, and she sat watching nervously for her journey's end to come.

The novelty and miseries of the way sometimes drove the thoughts of her errand from her for an instant—but for an instant only. Back they came after each stoppage, making her fret at the length of the road and spring up in nervous terror of missing her destination. It seemed hours from the time of starting, when she took courage to

make a second appeal, this time to a very little boy with a very capable air.

"Know Kensington?" he replied. "I should just think I did, and I only hope you've plenty of time to spare if you mean to get there this way. You should have changed at Gloucester Road, you know. We shall be at Hammersmith directly."

The look on her face startled even this complacent child. "There, there! Hold up, don't cry about it! I will see what I can do for you when we get out. They all know *me*, here."

He was as good as his word, and with his aid and that of a kindly porter, she found herself in the direct road once more; but time had been slipping on during her wanderings; and worse, her strength was fast slipping away too. She began to walk with the old painful drag; and sudden shoots of pain in the injured side made her stop and gasp for breath many a time during the last and worst part of her weary pilgrimage: the long endless miles of streets that lay between the station and St. Maur Road. The night was getting dark and clouded, and ten o'clock was sounding from some neighbouring steeple as she neared her goal. She was fain to hold by the railings to steady herself, as she peered up doubtfully at house after house, trying to make out the number. Nearly all were dark and shut up; only from one came a stream of soft light over flower-filled balconies into the road, and to it, as a beacon, she instinctively made her way. She had reached her journey's end at last.

She stood swaying backwards and forwards for a few minutes, lacking courage and strength to mount the steps, and, when she slowly and painfully dragged herself up to the door, her faltering knock—drowned in the festive bustle within—remained unanswered. It seemed impossible to try again; but, after long waiting, she did so. This time the door was opened, but no friendly face appeared—Henderson's or Aunt Mamie's, or one of the smart maids she knew, and who knew her—only that of a stranger, overwhelmed with responsibilities, and with dessert and ices on his mind. He gave one hasty glance at Elsie's dusty, dragged figure. "Not at home," he pronounced sharply before she had uttered a word, and would have closed the door had she not pressed forward desperately.

"But I *must* see her!" she almost shrieked. "Go and tell her I am here."

"I tell you I can't. We've company to-night. Come to-morrow, like a good girl. There, be off!" he exclaimed, distractedly. "Or, look here, if you'll give me your message, I'll take it when dinner's over; but you sha'n't come in now." And with visions of plate-and-drawing-room-ornament robberies rising to his memory, he shut the door, resolutely this time.

She staggered back, too overcome to make a further attempt, and sat down on the steps to think what she was to do next. Go home again? How could she face the toil? All that had passed since

she left Lavender Row seemed like a long nightmare. *How* could she gather up strength to encounter it a second time?

The night darkened, and a rain-storm came driving up from the east, of all points the most detestable. First came whirling little gusts, dry and cutting, flinging dust and gravel into eyes and mouth, with stinging arrows of rain that hardly seemed to wet the ground, only to spatter viciously Elsie's thin little cape till it clung to her bowed shoulders. Then more drops and bigger, and every now and then the driving, piercing gusts swept down from some unexpected quarter and beat her head down on her huddled-up knees.

She was soaked to the skin and chilled to the bone before she had sat there long. What did she care? Why should she stir? What shelter should she seek if this one was denied her? She even felt a dreary joy in her suffering when some fiercer blast than the rest showered its blows on her, leaving her stunned and breathless in its passing. She *could* not live through this, and there would be an end of all the trouble she had caused, and which she could never mend by living. Mrs. Damien would be sorry, though. She wished she could get up and go from that door to some other where nobody would know her when they found her dead there in the morning.

Down came the rain again, savagely pelting; so that the man who opened the door to call up a cab for the Archdales, if such a thing might be found, merely discharged a whistle into the darkness, and shut the door again, going to the window to watch for the result. Elsie hardly noticed him, nor yet, later on, the four-wheeler that drew up at her feet. Then, in an interval of comparative quiet, the door once more opened and a gentleman stepped out, and almost over her. She managed to raise her head to the rush of warmth and light that poured down on her, and he saw her face.

"Hullo! What's this? Hester, look here. Isn't this one of your girls? Dead or fainting, or something."

Within, in the warm, flower-scented drawing-rooms, the party was dispersing in languid, unwilling fashion, reluctant to break the charmed circle that held the evening's pleasure. Lord Altcar had the larger room to himself, sauntering leisurely round, looking at pictures and bric-a-brac, or returning with frowning brow and pursed lips to the working out of a project only less artful than the one of which he had contemplated the triumphant result that very evening. Mary Liddell, with a photograph upside down in her hands, was undisguisedly watching the lovers as Eustace bade a ten-minutes'-long farewell just within the soft green shadow of the conservatory palm-leaves. They were the first real lovers unsophisticated Mary had ever seen, and she thrilled from fingers to toes with gentle excitement and curiosity. Eustace in love, and looking like a lover, too! It was altogether wonderful and delightful. Would he talk to Rose like lovers in books? What *did* he say when he proposed? Did he go down on his knees—and oh! *would* he—did he—ever kiss her? And Mary

blushed and trembled vicariously at the audacious imagining. How thankful she was that it had not fallen to her lot to act the heroine's part in any such scene. How small and incompetent she would have felt, while this splendid Rose could never come short of perfection in whatever position she found herself. Most heartily did good little Mary give thanks that her hero had found just such a lady-love as she could have wished to bestow on him.

There! The farewell was over. *Had* he kissed her hand in that one brief minute when Lord Altcar's back was turned, and Mary, all aglow at her own tact and dexterity, had screened herself behind the biggest photograph? What was the noise outside? Here were the Archdales back again, and Hester at the door, saying, "Rose! Rose, do come here for a minute!" Mrs. Damien came forward, startled at Hester's tone, but before she reached the door, Hester was pushed aside, and Elsie, breaking from Sir John's sustaining arm, stood in the midst of them—a soiled, draggled, forlorn little figure, turning her wild eyes from one to another and holding out her shaking hands as if for pity.

"Elsie! my Elsie, what has happened to you?" And Rose hurrying up, made as if she would take the woe-begone little creature in her arms, but Elsie waved her back.

"Don't come near me or touch me! Listen to what I have come to tell you. To tell everybody. It is right you should all know what a wicked wretch I am. You will never forgive me. Never! I did not know what I was doing, but I killed him. I did indeed."

There was a second's pause, while her hearers looked at one another, all at fault but Hester, who, white and scared, seized her father's arm and gasped out two words.

"What?" roared Sir John. "Poynter? Does the girl mean him?"

Elsie nodded faintly; the little flash of strength that had given her voice to begin her confession was fast flickering out.

"She doesn't know what she is saying. *You* killed?—*You*?"

"How did you do it?" demanded Lord Altcar, striking in sharply.

"*I poisoned him!*" The words came out as she had been rehearsing them over and over again in her mind through the last long hours of woe—distinct and unmistakable. Then, tossing her arms despairingly, she gave one feeble cry, and fell in a senseless heap at Rose's feet.

(*To be continued.*)

A VANISHED REALM.

PERHAPS one of the most interesting features of Parisian society in the days that are now no more was the Salon, an institution that even as an exotic has always refused to flourish out of France.

It owed its origin to Madame de Rambouillet, who formed it for the purification and perfecting of the French language. No hereditary law transmitted its rule. The only and an unspoken canon was that a woman's hand should hold the sceptre. It thus became a powerful lever in the affairs of men. To be queen of a salon did not necessitate birth in the purple. Even before the Revolution had levelled classes, personal charm and esprit were the sole qualifications required. Madame de Rambouillet, it is true, boasted, in one sense, the purest blood; but her successor, Madame Geoffrin, was a true bourgeoisie, without a single link to the society she afterwards ruled with a grace and power that have scarcely ever been equalled. Madame de Rambouillet's coterie was narrow and fastidious; Madame Geoffrin's, in one sense, cosmopolitan, to which not only the royalty and aristocracy of the day crowded, but the chief men of letters, statesmen of all countries, and independent politicians.

The secret of her influence lay in personal charm, the perfect knowledge of the art of conversation and of receiving. Madame de Lespinasse was another notable instance of individual charm and tact, in spite of personal plainness and no social advantage. In a small apartment, actually furnished for her by her followers, she ruled with as high a hand as any autocrat to the manner born.

None of these women attempted any literary or artistic distinction; they were not even philanthropic; they simply talked and received beautifully, and achieved immortality.

A salon of those days meant the devotion of a life to its interests: it meant diplomatic art and power. But the social throne fell with the national one, and during the interregnum of the first Revolution the salon vanished. When order had succeeded chaos, the Parisians turned longingly to its restoration; but the *raison d'être* of the original institution had passed with restrictive monarchies, and it never again possessed the power or the charm it had formerly enjoyed. Men of extreme views now found easy ventilation on public platforms, in the press, in parliament, and public life generally.

But presently the salon assumed another *raison d'être*—that of art; and the reign, beginning afresh, took new vitality. For thirty years Madame Lebrun queened it every Saturday evening in her salon, sur-

rounded by all that France could boast of literature and art, and what it could muster of aristocrats. She died in 1842, at the age of ninety. "Age had not dimmed, nor custom staled her infinite variety."

Then came Mademoiselle Contat, the beautiful and popular actress and songstress. Society's craze was Music; its god Art; it rallied round the high priestess of the Sister Graces.

But Art was something more than a god to the impoverished noblesse; to such as had the endowment, it was bread; and the daughters of the Faubourg St. Germain worked in the studios of the great painters and sculptors as professional students. Others elaborated their musical gifts, and society at large benefited.

A generation of accomplished women had arisen, whose competition raised artists in the social scale. Talent became the fashion, and men of science occupied the highest places in the Synagogue. Society never was so brilliant. It was then bien porté to be poor; the gentry were proud of being "ruined by the Revolution." It was when Napoleon was the demi-god of salvation that Madame Recamier rose, a vision of beauty and grace, and taking the reins of the salon in her hands, ruled there with a power utterly isolated from parties or politics.

Her story is well known: the petty spite of Napoleon; her banishment and triumphant return, when the tyrant had become "a nameless thing." Her true salon dates from this period. She upheld it no longer with wealth and circumstance; the former had vanished, and the latter was not. She trusted to her esprit and her personal charm; and her salon became a power.

It was under her insensible guidance that Madame Möhl, then the plain English girl, Mary Clarke, became fitted to be her successor. She is described by Quinet as making a sorry figure, in homely dress and tangled hair, and yet greatly liked and considered by serious people. She was utterly devoid of self-consciousness. Her memoirs, by Kathleen O'Meara, recently published by Mr. Bentley, are charming reading; and, as the subject of them died so lately as 1883, they are invested with all the interest of matters and persons of the present day.

Although highly accomplished in conversation, Mary had not profited in manner and refinement by her intimate association with the denizens of the Abbaye. She had no "manners," so to speak; she had "wild ways;" and she was unconventional—a sin which would have been past redemption in the coterie of Madame de Rambouillet. It was the habit, for instance, Miss O'Meara tells us, when their chief guests dined in the Rue du Bac, where Mary resided with her mother, for these *amis de la maison* to take "forty winks" after dinner. This they accomplished in their arm-chairs, when Mary slipped off her shoes and curled herself up on the sofa.

The afternoon receptions, however, were conducted decorously, though simple and unceremonious. At these, Madame Récamier

would sometimes appear in her close-fitting blue velvet and her white satin hat with long marabout feathers curling to her shoulder.

Among the intimates of the Clarkes, the Manzonis occupy a conspicuous place, and Flauriel one entirely unique. During his life, Mary rejected all inducements to marry; he was her one great love. Thiers also was one of the habitués of the Rue du Bac. De Torquerville, Guizot, Cousin, Augustin Thierry, Constant—in fact, all the cleverest men of the day. Julius Möhl, the eminent Oriental scholar, haunted the house for years, and, in the end, when Flauriel had died, and Mary had rounded her half-century, he obtained her as his wife. He is wittily described by a Frenchwoman as “deep as a German, spirituel as a Frenchwoman, and loyal as an Englishman,” a descriptive eulogy that could hardly be surpassed.

The woman who was so patiently waited for for twenty-one years, was, in her way, as original as Julius Möhl. She has her eulogy in the words of Châteaubriand: “La jeune Anglaise is like no one else in the world.”

The Revolution of 1848 had been fatal to salon life, as in the nature of things revolutions must ever be. The few salons that remained, Madame de Boigne's and the Princess Lieven's, were simply political coteries, and ruled by party. In the true sense of the word they were not salons. France had with a rush developed her immense resources, and wealth was the god of the day. The sovereignty remains. “Party” ruined social gatherings.

Mary Clarke turned the opportunity to account. With the downfall of Louis Philippe began the more brilliant period of her salon. She cared very little for politics; and, although cherishing a bitter hatred to the Emperor and the Empire, she marshalled her coterie on neutral ground; and men, who had they met by chance would have scowled at each other, felt bound under her roof to keep the peace. Hers was essentially a salon d'esprit. Esprit was the shibboleth that opened her doors to all. This was the attraction. People went there simply for this.

It was a day of wild extravagance and luxury. Only those who could entertain, in the material sense of the word, could hope to hold a place in society. Yet this old woman, without rank or fortune, living in high-perched, shabbily-furnished rooms, attracted to her house all that was best worth having in Paris. By the sole magnet of her esprit she drew around her the most remarkable personalities, not only of France but of the world. Celebrities from every capital in Europe gave one another rendezvous at Madame Möhl's Friday evenings and Wednesday afternoons.

Hers was no passive reception, where the guests might look after themselves, and bore or be bored at will. She pounced upon anyone who sat staring at the company through an eyeglass, and made her company generally aware that they were expected to contribute to the common fund by talking or listening. Madame Möhl's was one of the

very few drawing-rooms under the Empire where the gentlemen did not form themselves into groups in the doorways and keep aloof from the ladies all the evening. Every man who entered her salon was expected to do his duty, and this duty was to make himself agreeable.

Madame Möhl has been accused of disliking Englishwomen. She loved and admired her countrywomen, but she could not abide them in her drawing-room. She would say: "What with their shyness, and their inability to hold their tongues, they're not fit for decent company." To a lady who asked to bring a friend she said: "If she is a woman, think well before you bring her, for of all the creatures that were ever created none does spoil society like an English lady."

Women of a far lesser intelligence have founded salons and attracted clever men by their personal beauty, but Madame Möhl's sole charm was the intellectual spell that she exercised. We are told that she took her rôle as mistress of a salon very much *au sérieux*. In later years she became its biographer, setting out the influence exercised through it by women in France. She told of the "blighting contempt and isolation" attendant on the poverty of literary men in England, and held up the contrast of the same class in France. Thus the salon in Mary Clarke's time was a benevolent institution, a refuge for homeless literary men. Clubs, so numerous now, did not attract thoughtful, cultivated men, addicted to high thinking and plain living; but clubs are a modern institution. Sixty years ago such men had not even the option of such a resource—they fortunately never missed it—they had the salon.

In England the institution has never thriven—nothing intrinsically French does thrive in British soil—and this failure must be laid at the door, not of the men, who would only too eagerly accept the situation, but to the women, who, with us now as ever, are as singularly devoid of the *savoir faire* of *esprit* as they would be incapable of ignoring class in the interests of intellect. The Englishwoman who in this country would be held fitted to queen it in a salon must have first and foremost social degree, and, next in order, wealth; she would be expected to have decided opinions on all subjects, and, lastly, a "party." These, in the British estimation, essentials to a salon are the secret of the utter failures that have followed every attempt to root it in English soil.

Mary Clarke's court in the Rue du Bac would have been an impossibility in London; she herself would have degenerated to a "Mrs. Leo Hunter." In this London of ours we go to the play to see the actors, and the creation of the dramatist is little more to us than the call-boy's whistle. So it would be with the salon. The feast of reason and the flow of soul would be caviare to the many, and the sole attention would centre in a celebrity or two; personalities often owing their eminence to adventitious circumstances rather than to intrinsic worth.

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF A YOUNG LADY.

JUNE 2nd.—I am alone in the house. It is the queerest feeling, but I like it so much.

Papa and Amy have gone to dine and sleep at Sir John Gray's, at least twenty miles off. Of course they took Ann with them, as she acts as lady's maid on these state occasions. And equally of course, being a state occasion, John had to sit on the driving-seat beside the coachman. And just this minute cook comes to ask my leave to—or rather to inform me that she intends to go and sit with her sick sister in the village for an hour or so. And so I am actually alone, mistress of all I survey.

If only I could have an adventure !

But adventures never do happen. I am sixteen years old, and I have never had an adventure in my life. If it were a novel, now, adventures would be sure to come ; or a fairy tale would be better still. How I do wish it were a fairy tale, and that I were the princess. Well, I will go out and walk in the garden, for it is a most lovely evening ; but there is no chance of a fairy prince paying me a visit, I am afraid. The more's the pity.

Nine o'clock p.m. Oh, what a wonderful thing has happened to me ! What shall I do ? What *can* I do ? I little thought when I was writing those lines in joke, of the adventure that awaited me in the garden. How strange and terrible it has been, and what will happen next ? It has only *begun* as yet, and such a beginning !

I hope I have not been wicked. I don't feel as if I blamed myself, and yet I am sure that when I tell papa he will be angry with me. But what could I do ?

I really could not—could not—help it.

I was walking on the gravel path at the end of the garden when someone jumped over the hedge. I was so startled, and thought directly of my fairy prince. But it was not even a gentleman ; it was a lad of nineteen or twenty, dressed as a sailor. His complexion and hair were very dark, a sort of mahogany colour, and a glance told me his features were handsome. I thought he was like a Spaniard, only I don't know whether Spaniards ever have blue eyes, and his eyes were certainly blue. I never saw anyone so out of breath, or look so frightened and hurried as he did when he saw me.

He quite jumped back from me even as he alighted ; but the next moment came up to me, and said vehemently, in a sort of panting way, as if he could hardly draw his breath :

"Young lady—will you help me ? They will soon be here. If

they take me I am a lost man. Will you save me? For heaven's sake say yes."

"What *can* I do?" I cried.

He was so agitated that he could hardly reply.

"Hide me—take me in there," pointing to the house, "and hide me somewhere—anywhere—quick, quick, before they come. A minute more may be too late. Hide me till they are gone!"

There was an agony of supplication in his tone. His face was one prayer. He looked ready to fall, to die.

What ought I to have done? I am sure I don't know. What I *did* do was to bid him follow me, and then run swiftly through the garden, into the house and upstairs.

There I paused a moment to reflect. But reflect as I would, I could only think of one place where he might be hid safely, and from which I should be able to let him out unseen, if cook returned.

I led him through Amy's bedroom into mine, which opened out of hers. In the recess by the fire-place is a long press made by large doors put in front of it. One of these doors fastens with a bolt inside, and the other with a lock and key. I unlocked this one, made him get in and go to the far end beyond the other door, with half-a-dozen dresses hanging between him and the place he had entered by. I desired him to stay there as quietly as possible, and said that I would let him out when it seemed safe to do so.

Then I went down stairs into the drawing-room, feeling as if I was walking in a dream, sat down at the piano and played loudly and noisily. It seemed to me the only thing I could do, I was in such a fever of fright.

Who were the "they" that he expected to come after him?

The question was soon answered. I saw policemen walking up to the front door. Some of them dispersed about the grounds, and two rang the house bell. I let them ring twice before I opened the door.

"What *do* you want?" cried I, my heart beating till I was nearly blind and deaf. "*Everybody* is out—servants and all."

"Beg pardon, miss," said one of the men, "sorry his reverence is not within—for we must go all over the house. Will you have the kindness to show us the way?"

"No, indeed. I am sure my father would be very angry. What do you want?"

"Don't you be frightened, miss, but it's a young man we're after, who was *seen* coming down the lane, so he must be somewhere about the premises—for there is nowhere else he can be. No harm shall come of it, and we'll take the greatest care of you; so don't you be frightened. But it's a bad business, and have him we must. And we can't lose time either, so please show us the way."

And I did. I took them everywhere—all over the house: kitchens, offices, cellars, sitting-rooms.

"I suppose you don't want to go upstairs?" I cried. But they told

me he would be sure to hide in the most unlikely places, so they went.

All through the bedrooms then, and at the very last, Amy's room—and mine!

Every now and then a press or closet was fastened and could not be opened, and this was the case with the long press in my room, of which I had the key in my pocket. They asked me if this, too, was locked up, and I said yes. Then one of the men said: "Do you know where the key is?" I opened a drawer while I answered: "You see it is not here. My sister keeps her dresses in it, and she will not be home till to-morrow."

"All right, miss," said the policeman.

Oh, how I hope I was not very wicked. I did not tell a lie, but I equivocated; and I have always despised equivocation, and maintained it was worse than lying when Amy said it was not so bad. I will never, *never* again wish for an adventure.

At last these dreadful policemen went away, and I have sat down to write an account of what has happened because I do not feel able to do anything else. They said they were going to Lypton; and I suppose I must give them plenty of time to get there, and not leave the least chance of their coming back, and that I had better not let this troublesome young man out for an hour.

Hark, what is that?

The sound of wheels on the gravel! What *can* be going to happen now? *Not* another adventure, I do hope.

Good gracious! It is the carriage come back, and papa and Amy in it! What can it mean?

June 3rd.—I am writing in bed. I was too ill to get up. They have left me alone, telling me to go to sleep. It is easy to tell me that, but I doubt whether I shall ever sleep again. I can't read, I can't keep quiet. Thinking is dreadful, and I will try if I can write down all the terrible things that happened last night. I will begin at the beginning, and if I can, I will put everything in order just as it occurred.

Papa and Amy came in. Papa looked so white and stern, he frightened me. Amy was crying bitterly, and when she took her handkerchief from her face, it seemed as if she had cried without ceasing for hours. My guilty conscience immediately suggested that they had found out what I had done and had come back immediately. I was a goose to think it, but I was so frightened. Papa angry, and poor Amy shocked and miserable, and all because I had hid that sailor. I stood up before them and could not say a word. Papa put his arm round me and kissed me.

"Don't be alarmed, my poor Lucy," he said; "we are well and safe. But something very dreadful has happened; so dreadful that I hardly can bear to tell my dear little girl. Poor—poor Sir John——"

He stopped—quite overcome. I had never seen my father like this before. He was always so self-possessed.

"Oh, what, papa? Is he ill?—dead?"

"He is *murdered*," replied my father, speaking with difficulty. I screamed.

"When we got there all was in confusion and misery. He had been shot dead in the wood by a young sailor, with whom he had words about poaching and trespassing in the morning. The scoundrel attacked him and shot him."

"Oh, papa!"

"The diabolical villain has escaped, but the police are in hot pursuit, and he must be found. They have traced him to within a few miles of the coast here, and he can't escape them. He will be taken and hanged for his horrible crime. That is in one way a consolation; but his punishment will not bring back our poor friend."

What was happening? I grew hot, then cold, a deadly sickness came over me, all so suddenly; then the room moved. Papa's voice got farther and farther away, the floor slid off from under my feet, and I knew no more. No more till something cold fell on my face, and I thought they were cruelly waking me out of a heavy sleep from which I *couldn't* wake, while the mere attempt to do so was great pain.

At last I could see again, faintly and dimly. Papa was leaning over me. What was it? What had I done? Was he angry?

"Forgive me," was all I could say.

"Poor darling," said papa, very kindly. "The shock was too much. I ought not to have told you so abruptly. You fainted, my dear. Go to bed now, little girl, and sleep off the horror of it all."

I was very much surprised to hear that I had fainted.

"Don't talk to Amy about it," continued papa, "but both of you go to bed."

Go to bed? Yes—and the murderer was concealed in my bedroom!

However, papa's word was law, and Amy and I kissed him and went upstairs. We entered her room.

"I can't sleep alone to-night," I cried, passionately. "I must sleep with you, Amy."

She looked dubiously at the size of her bed. "Yours is larger, Lucy," she said. "I'll sleep with you. We shall both be better for company."

"No," I cried in despair, "I can't sleep in that room. This is nearer papa's, and I'll stay here."

My will was stronger than Amy's, though Amy was older than I; and, as usual, I had my way. Amy slowly took off her dress.

"I'll hang it up in the press," she said, wearily.

"Oh, no, no," I cried, "put it on a chair for to-night. Never mind it, never mind it!" and I wrung my hands. Then Amy undressed and went to bed, and so did I. I suppose if I live to be a hundred year old I shall never forget what I suffered last night.

Papa's old friend, whom, however, I only knew a little, *murdered*; shot dead in the wood. That was horror and grief enough. And yet, just then, that really seemed almost the smallest part of my misery.

What ought I to do? I had hidden the murderer. I, little Lucy Lee, had hidden a murderer! I shuddered when I thought he was a living man, in the next room, hidden away among Amy's and my pretty dresses. What ought I to do? Ought I to tell papa? To tell him was, of course, the same thing as giving the man up to be hanged, and I shuddered and wept where I lay, until Amy said: "Poor child! do try to go to sleep."

I stuffed the sheet into my mouth to prevent my screaming aloud. No, I could not do it. I might be wicked, but if I was wicked I could not help it, and wicked I must be. I should get up when the house was quiet in the depth of the night, when all good people were asleep, and let him out. I was obliged to do it, I could not help myself: I *could* not give him up to be hanged.

One o'clock, two o'clock struck. Amy, the soundest of sleepers, was in that heavy slumber that follows long crying. I rose softly, put on a few clothes, my dressing-gown over them, and a shawl wrapped round me. I went with bare feet, as I feared the sound even of slippers. I caught sight of myself in the glass as I passed by. My hair was all hanging about me, and I looked so pale and scared I should not have known my own face. I required no candle, for a large, beautiful summer moon poured its light over everything.

I dared not linger or delay. If I did I felt that all my courage would go from me; ooze out at the end of my fingers. I pushed the door open between the two rooms, and entered mine.

On my dressing-table lay my own little Bible, on the title page of which, in round, childish hand, was my name written, "Lucy Lee, from her dear papa, on her tenth birthday," and in which I had read night and morning for six years. With sudden impulse, I caught it up and held it in one hand, while with the other I unlocked the door of the press.

"Come out," I whispered, very low.

Suppose it was a dream and there was no one there! Alas, it was no dream. He came out. How wretched and forlorn he looked after having been for hours shut up there with hardly air to breathe. I put my finger on my lips, and he followed me noiselessly, his shoes in his hands, through Amy's room, who never stirred in her sleep. If she had waked then, and seen him and me gliding along at the foot of her bed! We went on down stairs and into the kitchen.

Then I spoke.

"I shall let you go," I said—my voice sounded to me quite unlike itself—"and I shall give you my Bible." I put it in his hands. "Promise me to read it. Oh, please repent your dreadful sin, try to be good, and pray—and—and read the Bible I have given you."

I hardly knew what I was saying. How he looked at me, poor, wretched creature—so young, and such a sinner !

"I think you are an angel," he said, "you beautiful child. I should like to kiss your bare feet as I would those of a saint on a shrine. I *do* promise you I will read your Book. I have been a bad fellow, but I will go and sin no more."

I was trembling with fear and emotion while I softly unlocked and opened the kitchen door and said: "Go away. God help you. *Please* go away."

He looked at me just once more and said: "I shall never forget you," and then he was off like an arrow from a bow.

I relocked the door with a great breath of relief. It was over. He was gone, and I went back into the hall. As I entered it, the opposite door, which is that of papa's study, slowly opened. I gave a loud scream, and the next moment my father stood before me, a candle in his hand. I trembled from head to foot, but could not speak.

"Lucy!" cried he in astonishment.

Still I could not utter a word.

"Lucy, what brings you here? What are you doing? Your feet are bare. You will make yourself ill. Is she walking in her sleep?" he added hastily, and held the candle before my eyes.

How ghastly he and everything looked, the broad moonlight pouring down on us, and the wretched little candle held up between him and me.

"I can't help it, papa," I found I said, but I did not know what I meant.

"My dear child, you are feverish and excited. I believe you don't know what you are doing or saying. Go back to bed at once. Don't stand there catching cold. Why, what have you done to your foot? It is cut—it is bleeding!"

I looked down at my foot, and indeed there was a great cut there, and I had left a track of blood behind me. I must have cut it against something on the kitchen floor.

"Does it not hurt you, Lucy?"

It was only at that moment that I felt it did; till then I had not even known of its existence; but I discovered now that it was throbbing and smarting.

"It hurts very much," I said pitifully, for I cannot bear pain.

"My poor child, what were you doing in the kitchen?"

"I can't tell you, papa. Do you know that the police were here last night, and searched the house?"

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, yes, they were. It is quite true."

"Why did you not tell me before?" he cried, sternly. "Do you mean that they were searching for this wretch?"

"Yes. It was all so dreadful, I never thought about that, and only remembered it just this minute."

We had reached Amy's room door while we talked, and papa kissed me and bade me tie up my foot in a handkerchief and go to bed at once. He woke Amy, and told her that I was feverish and had been wandering about the house, not knowing what I did, and that she must look after me and take care of me.

To-day I was so ill they would not let me get up.

June 4th. I was so restless and miserable I could not stay in bed yesterday evening, and this morning I came down to breakfast. I don't know how I managed to drag through the day. It was horrible. No one who came to the house spoke of anything but capturing the murderer, and the greatest fear was expressed that he had escaped in a boat, and been carried off by some of the smugglers about the coast.

"Only, bad characters as they *are*," my father said, "I don't think they are bad enough for *that*. They would have given him up."

I felt then how wicked I had been. I had done worse than papa believed smugglers capable of. I had never seen him so angry or stern about anything. His one desire was to have the criminal punished, and his eagerness in assisting in the search quite astonished me. I was afraid to look him in the face.

In the evening we were at tea as usual, when the post came in. There was a letter from papa's old friend, Mr. Wilson, which drew off our attention for a short time from the one engrossing subject. It told a sad story of how he had discovered that his eldest daughter had formed an engagement with a young officer without his knowledge. He was a man of bad character, and she had given him up now and her father had forgiven her.

"Wilson is a better Christian than I am, I fear," papa said, "though he is not a clergyman. I should find it hard to forgive either of you children if I found you had deceived me in anything. Thank God, I can trust you," and he looked at us very lovingly.

I stood up on my feet; despair was in my heart; I felt as if I were going to die, as if I *must* die. I could not bear life any longer. I rushed up to him, knelt down and looked in his face. I was trembling all over, but I could not speak a word or shed a tear.

He lifted me on his knees and held me in his arms very tenderly.

"My dear child," he said, "do not excite yourself so; you will seriously displease me if you do not try to control yourself. This must not be. We have all of us power of self-control, and ——"

But even as he spoke I had fainted on his shoulder. The second time I had fainted since that dreadful night. When I knew anything again I was in bed, and there they have made me stay; and I believe they have sent for a doctor to-day; and my head aches so I won't write any more.

June 25th.—I have been very ill with a fever, and this is the first day they have allowed me to amuse myself by writing, but I am getting well now. I have been reading my journal. They say the shock of

hearing of Sir John's murder gave me a fever—a nervous fever they call it. They little know how much more reason there was for my illness than the one they think sufficient. I do not wonder that fear and suspense and remorse made me ill.

The murderer has escaped. It is more than a month now, so he must be safe. And I have made up my mind to tell papa. I can't bear the misery and remorse of deceiving him, and when he comes and sits by my bedside every morning and reads to me and chats, it almost breaks my heart.

I don't know whether I have committed a crime and broken the law, or whether the lawyers can do anything to me. I believe what I have done is called misprision of murder, but I am not sure. I don't know whether I can be put in prison or transported, or whether papa can be heavily fined and ruined. I cannot think he will consider it his duty to give me up to justice; but perhaps he will say I am very wicked, and will send me away from him. I am crying so much I can't write any more.

July 14th.—I think I am strong enough to write down what happened yesterday. Papa came in as usual after breakfast and gave me a kiss. I thought, perhaps that is the last kiss *like that* he will ever give me. He read to me; and I tried to gather strength from what he read to do right, and make my confession.

When he had finished, almost before the last word had been uttered, I was so afraid of my resolution giving way, I said: "Papa, I have something dreadful to tell you."

He just looked at me.

"I have been wicked, and I could not help it; and if it was to do over again, I should be just as bad."

Then he said very gravely: "You are talking wildly, Lucy. Every-one can help yielding to temptation, if they take the right way."

"But I don't think it was temptation; it was nothing pleasant: I did not want to do it. It was dreadful, but I did it, and I am not sorry that I did it; and I know I should do it over again. Papa is it not hard that such things should happen and we should not be able to help them?"

The stern look I knew so well and dreaded so much had come into my father's face, and I hid my eyes from it.

He answered me very gravely. "If you will tell me what you have done, Lucy, I shall be better able to point out to you how sinful it is to speak in this way."

Then my courage left me. He was angry already, though he knew nothing; what would he be when I had made my confession?

"I can't tell you," I cried.

"You *must*," he replied, with an air of authority. "I am extremely displeased at what you have said, and I insist on an explanation."

I trembled ; but I was powerless. I could not set my will against his.

"Do you remember," I said at last, "the night of—the—murder—when you came home?"

"Of course I do," with the same grave displeasure.

And of course he did, it was a stupid way of beginning.

"Papa, the murderer was in my bedroom press."

He took my hand hastily and felt my pulse in an alarmed manner. Then he sat down. He looked quite pale, with horror in his eyes.

"In your bedroom press?" he slowly repeated.

"Yes," I cried, and I poured it all out to him. I told him everything. How the sailor had come to me in the garden ; how I had hidden him in my room ; my terror when he told me of the murder ; my dreadful thoughts in bed when I was undecided how to act ; and how at last, I took the man down into the kitchen, gave him my Bible, let him out through the back door, and then met papa as I was returning to my room.

He walked up and down the apartment as I spoke, and he never interrupted me to say a word ; but was silent all the time. It was better so, and I poured out my whole heart to him.

After I had finished he was still silent and continued his pacing up and down. Then it became hard to bear. He was judging me ; what would my sentence be ? I dared not say a word in extenuation nor utter an entreaty for pardon. I knew a fault must be repented and, if possible, atoned for, before papa would listen to the offender. I knew how stern he could be, how severe, and yet how kind and how just. At that moment I loved him as I had never done yet, at that moment when he might be going to send me from him, as too wicked to be his child, or a companion for Amy.

At last he spoke.

"This is a very sad story, Lucy. You have passed through a terrible trial, and I pity you very much. You must try to calm yourself, and to be as little excited as you can, for you are not at all strong."

"Oh, papa, papa ; will you love me still and not send me away from you?"

I was crying so much that I could hardly speak. He leant over me and kissed me.

"I will not send you away, my child, and I do love you. But I will not allow another word to be said about it at present. You are too much agitated, and will make yourself ill again. Some day when you are stronger we will talk it over together, and see where you have been wrong and how you could have acted differently."

He kissed me again and left me. Dear, kind, good, tender father, how can I love you enough?

August 21st.—I have been very slow in my recovery but I am

nearly quite well now. Papa never spoke to me again about the murder till to-day, but we have just had a long conversation on the subject. I hope I shall feel calmer and more at ease. I sometimes think of it all till I don't know what to do. I feel as if I had left, not my childhood only, for I am not a child now, but my youth behind me on that fatal night; as if I could never be light-hearted again.

Well, after a little talk about it, papa asked me if I knew I had broken the law of the land? This frightened me; but I said I had never been sure about that, and I asked him if I had been accessory after the fact, for I had some idea that that was what I had done.

He told me that by the law every subject was bound to give up a criminal, and could be punished for not doing so. And then he said that my act had placed him in the most painful position he had ever found himself in during his whole life. He explained to me that being a magistrate as well as a clergyman, he owed duties to the government; and that, after much serious thought, he had made up his mind he should be neglecting these duties if he kept this matter a secret. Accordingly, he had written a statement to the Home Secretary, who was a friend of his, to the effect that on the night of the second of June, a young sailor, who was believed to be the murderer of Sir John Gray, had been concealed in his house for some hours by a member of his household, a girl of sixteen. I believe I gave a little scream at that. He had been kept, he continued, a whole fortnight in cruel suspense before the answer came which relieved his mind, for the Home Secretary had evidently no intention of advising him to take any steps in consequence of his letter.

"In consideration of your recent illness and state of nervous weakness, Lucy," he went on to say, "I saved you from the knowledge of what I had done till the illness was over. But for that I should have told you at first, for when people take a great responsibility on themselves, as you did, I consider that they ought to bear the consequences, whatever they may be.

I thanked him earnestly, and then pondering on his words I exclaimed: "But it would have been a much greater responsibility to have had him hanged!"

"My dear, in that case, had you refused to harbour him, you would have taken no responsibility on yourself at all; you would simply have done your duty, and obeyed the law of the country you live in. You did not know whether he would be hanged or acquitted or pardoned; but whatever happened it was nothing to you; your duty was to obey the law. The minute you heard my story of the murder you should have told me."

"But I fainted."

"You recovered; you are not fainting still; you were not fainting when you let him out through the kitchen."

"And if he had not repented—if he had been—hanged unrepentant?" I shuddered and hid my face in my hands.

"That may have been the very means intended to bring about his repentance, and he may now be leading a life of sin—adding crime to crime—and making pardon and penitence more and more difficult. But with all that you had nothing to do : you had no right to look forward—the duty—your own duty—of the moment—was all you had to deal with."

"I am sorry that I can't be sorry, papa. *That* troubles me now. I know he won't be hanged, and you have forgiven me, and the lawyers won't do anything to me, so I am much happier ; but I am sorry that I am not sorry. I *can't* repent having saved a man's life. And it puzzles me in my prayers, for I can't pray to be strengthened another time to get a man hanged, or to be made to repent that I did not let this one be hanged."

"You are not likely to be tried again," said my father, drily ; "such a circumstance does not happen twice in a lifetime. But I'll tell you what you can do, you can pray to be forgiven your sins, whatever they may be, and for strength to sin no more. Do this in all sincerity, and don't trouble yourself with analysing your thoughts and feelings. It has been a very hard trial for a young girl. Try and do your duty for the future, and don't think more about the past than you can help."

"Dearest papa, I will try and do everything you tell me with all my might ; and you won't be vexed that I can't be sorry. Perhaps when I am older," I added very thoughtfully, "I may think differently about getting a man hanged. I am but a girl now, you know. I will follow your advice, and I like it. I will try to do right and not worry."

Papa kissed me. "Good girl," he said. "I will not expect more than that from you. Perhaps if we are both of us alive twenty years hence, you and I may talk over this matter again."

"Twenty years ! Good gracious, papa, I shall be six-and-thirty, so frightfully old to talk about anything !"

Papa looked a little grave. "Oblige me, my dear, by not saying good gracious ; it is very unladylike."

I blushed and begged his pardon. Papa is very particular, but I think I like him all the better for being particular.

June 19th.—Westbeed. Two years have passed since that terrible occurrence. I am eighteen to-day. I remember when I thought it would be quite old to be eighteen ; *too* much grown up, even when I considered to *grow* up the most desirable thing on earth. Eighteen to-day and as much a girl as ever, and no longer thinking that to be *twenty* is to be old. Yet things have happened that might make me feel how time passes, and what momentous events it brings with it. Amy is twenty, and is as soft, tender, placid and sweet, as young and

girlish as ever. But Amy is engaged to be married, and even that does not make me feel old.

We have come to the seaside for the summer, a gay watering-place as well as a pretty one. Fred Langley is with us; it is a delightful neighbourhood for lovers' walks; we are all as happy as possible. We arrived late to-night, and to-morrow I expect that perfect happiness will begin. I have not stayed at the seaside since I was a child, and I know I shall delight in the rocks and the sands and the pebbly beach. I took one walk out, though it was almost dark when we arrived, just to hear the pleasant sound of my feet crunching among the stones.

June 20th.—I have had a sort of a shock to-day. But I must try not to let myself be influenced by it. It would be inexcusable if I allowed any of the nervousness of two years ago to return on me, now I am strong and in good health.

I ran out, full of spirits, before breakfast this morning—the lovers were not up yet, more shame to them; lovers should be for ever enjoying this beautiful world; and as a matter of course I was standing as soon as possible on the light foam that rested on the sands, marking the line from which the waves had just retired. I inhaled sea breezes, I smelt sea smells, I saw sea sights, I heard sea sounds, I was happy!

Suddenly I saw a boat being dragged down near to where I stood, dragged down by four sailors. Their dress and something about them sent a thrill through me. And then, one man turning round, I beheld a dark thin face, with a pair of blue eyes in it, and the thrill came again. A perfect shiver, horribly intense; the kind which creeps over one, coming one knows not why or from whence, at the call of a ghost story that sounds *too* true.

And was it not for a ghost that I felt it now? A ghost coming back from the dead days of the past?

I do not suppose that dark-faced, blue-eyed sailor is the lad I hid two years ago. He is not as tall, I think, as that lad was, and he looks older than he would be now. Besides, what can be more unlikely than that he is the same? I have an idea, too, that Sir John's murderer had sharply-cut, handsome features, and the man whose blue eyes looked at me over the boat this morning, though rather good looking, cannot be said to have such. I have no thought that it is the same; indeed the notion is simply absurd; but I am vexed to find that the mere fact of his sailor dress, dark skin, and blue eyes possess such power over me. I did not think the impression made by that night's adventure was so deep.

June 24th.—I have battled with my fears, and look undaunted in the face of every sailor that passes me. When that one frightened me the first day, I found, to my surprise, that I had no clear recollection of the features of the murderer. He was rather tall and thin, I am nearly sure—looking a mere lad. He had a mahogany skin,

and light blue eyes, that sparkled or seemed to do so, perhaps, in contrast with that dark complexion, and I have an impression of a handsome face—but that is all. Yet if it were not that I feel a conviction that if I saw the man again I should remember him suddenly and entirely: I declare if it were not for that conviction, I should say that I could not take my oath that the sailor at the boat was *not* he. But of all the improbable things on earth the most improbable is that he and I should ever meet again. The man, if he is alive, will take care never to return to England. He would get employment abroad, and not set his foot on these shores, where he would for ever be in danger of his life. I *know* I cannot see the man again, and I must not be such a goose as to let his ghost haunt me.

Sept. 1st.—I am going to-night to my first ball. How I have longed for my first ball ever since I knew what a ball meant. How I have longed to accompany Amy, when charmingly dressed and looking charming, she has issued forth with Lady Freeman, who always acted as her chaperon, to the few dances our neighbourhood affords. And now my turn has arrived, and I am in great luck to come in for a ball here.

Sept. 2nd.—Such a happy evening. I never enjoyed myself so much. Nay, that is saying little—I never knew that there was such enjoyment to be had.

I made a great discovery, and an extremely pleasant one. I knew that Amy was pretty, but I had not an idea that I was. In fact I never thought about it. I cannot understand now, how it was I never thought about it—but I never did. And last night, all of a sudden, I found out that I was one of the belles of the room. “The pretty Miss Lees,” were talked about everywhere, and I was called the prettiest! Of course that is nonsense, for Amy *is* prettier than I am, but still it was delightful, and such a surprise. And though I never thought about it before, I find that being pretty makes life twice as pleasant as it was! I was dancing all last night, and I could dance all to-day for mere joy.

We were dressed alike, in white, filmy gauze robes, with red roses in our hair and on our breasts. The rooms were brilliantly lighted and full of pretty people and dresses. Everybody was kind, and cherished and made much of me because I was young and at my first ball. Everybody seemed pleased to look at me, and glad to see me happy, and then, by and by, I found out the pleasant secret that I was a pretty girl. I danced with agreeable men and good dancers. But the evening was about a quarter gone before *the* event happened, and the pleasure became ever so much more than at first. It came about in this wise.

Mrs. Chiston, at whose house the ball was, said to me, laughing: “Here is another man who *will* be introduced to you, Miss Lee. Mr. Chiston says his arm is nearly pulled off by questioners asking who you are.”

I felt myself blushing and smiling with pleasure as she murmured her introductions, of course inaudibly. I think I only heard the name of one man out of all the many strangers I was introduced to last night, but what's in a name? A man with any other name can waltz as well, and this nameless one waltzed the best of all.

He is the handsomest man I ever saw in my life. Tall, with broad shoulders, and strong, well-knit frame. A thorough Saxon, with fair complexion and hair, statue-like features, and an expression that no sculptor's hand ever yet bestowed on statue's face; all sweetness and manliness; with that slight melancholy in it that is irresistibly bewitching because it speaks of a higher order of mind, with aspirations that earth cannot satisfy.

I think if I had not by this time discovered that I was pretty, the way in which this man looked at me would have told me. There was admiration and more even than admiration in his eyes. It was a beautiful expression that I cannot define or put into words, but which was, I think, due more to the goodness of his own heart than of his face. And somehow it was an expression that made me feel at home with him at once. It was as if he had been always looking for something that he had found in me, and that he was content now he had found it. He was as agreeable as he was handsome, and he had that peculiar power about him that made those whom he conversed with agreeable also. I felt that I was at my very best in my talk, and that feeling joined to his evident admiration, enhanced all my pleasure. After dancing with him I did not care for any other partner. I grudged every waltz I had to give away from him owing to engagements I had formed before we were introduced. I gladly shirked some of them to sit out with him. I was full of joy when we strolled together in the garden under the soft, kindly moonlight; and I was almost too happy when his manœuvres succeeded and he managed to secure me for the dance before supper, notwithstanding my previous engagement to everybody else.

Yet all this time I did not feel as if I was flirting, nor did it occur to me that anyone else could consider that I was doing so. There was a seriousness in his manner and a melancholy in his face that to my mind raised our intercourse far above flirtation. Not that I thought this consciously, for truth to say, I did not think about it at all—I simply enjoyed myself—and I did that more than I had ever done in my life before, and in a different way.

It was only when Fred Langley said to me as we returned home: "Well, Loo, you *have* been going it—you have done the business of that poor young man for him," that any idea beyond simple happiness almost unconscious of itself, crossed my mind.

I am very fond of my future brother-in-law, but at that moment I thought him stupid and vulgar and wished he wouldn't.

Sept. 3rd.—Another day of enchantment. My nameless hero was at the picnic we had been invited to join, and he never left my

side all day. Amy was not well, and, of course, Fred the devoted stayed at home with her, and papa hates picnics. I was, therefore, in Mrs. Chiston's charge, which was the same thing as being in nobody's charge at all. She at once turned me over to my new friend when she found he wanted me, and was too busy talking herself to attend to anyone else's affairs.

I think a picnic is much better managed than a ball, because at a ball people surround you directly and write their names on your card; and, do what you will, you must dance with more than one man; while at a picnic, if one man wishes it and manages well, you can belong to him all the time, and that in a natural sort of way and without making yourself at all particular. My hero *did* wish it and managed uncommonly well. By the end of that long, blissful summer day I felt as if I had known him all my life, and that that life was glorified by the knowledge. Oh, what a day it was! Were skies ever so blue before, or will the shadows from the trees ever lie again with such exquisite grace on the grass? I inhaled joy with every breath I drew.

We talked about everything. He has travelled a great deal, and travelled with his eyes open, and he is full of talent and taste. I should not be in the least surprised if he is a man of genius, and yet I never found it so easy to talk to anyone before. He seems to like everything I say, and to find something better in it than I knew the words expressed. I could not make out if he has any profession, and to this moment I do not know his name.

But that amuses me so exceedingly that I would not learn it on any account. I have carefully abstained from asking the question of anybody. It is so delightfully incongruous to feel more intimate with this man in two days than with most of those I have known all my life, and the height of all is, that I do not even know his name!

He knows mine, so he has not the same pleasure that I have, and perhaps he is so wise it would not be any pleasure to him. He calls me Miss Lee and once or twice Miss Lucy Lee. I wonder what his Christian name is. I don't much care about his surname, but I should like to know the other.

All that's bright must fade,
The brightest still the fleetest,
All that's sweet was made
But to be lost when sweetest.

And so this blissful day came to an end, and we parted. He held my hand in his to say good-bye. His fingers closed round it. Why is the touch of some fingers so different from that of others? I never before felt a thrill run over me at the clasp of any hand. He pressed mine so softly that I more knew than felt that there was any pressure at all, and he whispered more than said, "Do not forget me."

Forget him ! as if that were possible ! Why, I shall remember him as long as I live. Has not my acquaintance with him changed, in some strange manner, my whole life, giving me a sort of feeling as if I had never lived before, dividing that life into two halves : one half containing eighteen years, the other two days—and the little half, all in all !

I trod on air as I ran up stairs to Amy's room. She was in bed, but much better, nearly recovered from the slight cold she had caught, and eager to hear an account of my day. First telling me that she had had a "good time" with Fred, though papa had insisted on her going to bed early.

I told her everything, and she listened with smiling interest ; but even while I was in the midst of my happy story I was called by papa. He had just had a telegram telling him of the sudden dangerous illness of my Aunt Elinor, whom we had left in charge of the Parsonage during our absence. It was necessary that we should return home by the first train next morning, and I must set to work to pack up my things and Amy's also, and she must get a good long night's rest to make her fit for the journey to-morrow. This was all so unexpected and startling that it left me hardly time to think about anything ; but when I kissed Amy and bade her good-night, she whispered softly in my ear : "And what about never marrying now, Lucy, as you used to say in the days gone by ? What about nobody ever being so good as papa ?"

I stared in her face utterly astonished. What could she mean ? What possible connection was there between her questions and anything that had happened ? Then as the meaning flashed suddenly upon me I grew angry and blazed up into wrath.

"As if it could make any possible difference," I cried, full of indignation. "Why should I marry ? Of course I never shall. Is not papa just the same as he ever was ? Amy, I am ashamed of you." And I marched out of the room, my head in the air, and went to bed in a rage.

(To be concluded.)



UNDER NORTHERN SKIES.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," &c.



A ROCKING STONE.

SVANIKE seemed the most spirited place we had yet seen in Bornholm. This by comparison. No place in the little island is really noisy or enterprising. Svanike is built almost upon the sea. Water, deep enough to float a large vessel, came up almost to the very doors of the inn. Only a few yards off was the harbour; one harbour within another, built in fashion peculiar to itself; the outer harbour stretching in crescent form, like arms meeting in friendly embrace. There was just room for a vessel to pass through the opening, and no more.

Beyond, the deep sea stretched far as sight could reach; and for ever resting upon it, that white cloud, the little island of Christiansö: another harbour of refuge, similar to Svanike, but still smaller and of less reputation.

That evening was an important one for the little place, and it was seen under excited circumstances. An excursion boat was coming in from Copenhagen, bringing a small army of visitors for a twenty-four hours' sojourn. This was not welcome news. Excursionists were evidently not to be avoided, even in the remote ends of the earth. The hotel was in a fermented condition. Our landlady was encumbered with applications for rooms, and two unexpected arrivals caused her cup of perplexity to overflow. But possession is nine points of the law. "J'y suis, j'y reste," said Dumas, when the official tried to turn him out of his dark closet. Strong measures, however, were hardly necessary in this instance. Our ladylike and obliging hostess had no intention of consigning us, who were first on the scene, to other quarters. The excursionists were not even in sight.

There were Runic remains in the neighbourhood, and we went in search of them. The little town was hilly, but the streets were straight enough as far as the regularity of the houses was concerned. Away from the shore everything was quiet. We passed the churchyard, and went into the church. It was plain and unadorned, cold and cheerless, as are most of the churches in these Northern latitudes. Whitewashed walls, high-backed pews and narrow seats; windows guiltless of colour. The sun streams in, but it is always white and glaring. There is no dim religious light in their services; no appealing to the imagination; very seldom anything attempted even in the way of oratory. Cold are the voices, often hard and metallic. The soft whispers which thrill the emotions, and the sympathetic tones that touch the heart are rarely heard. They are banished as unhealthy influences which do not carry with them the essence of Divine life. It is as if these colder climes threw a chilling mantle over the hearts of men, repressing outward emotion. Calm and dispassionate are they, for the most part. Everything has its good side; and perhaps the good here is that these Northern races are not carried away by enthusiasm. They are slow, but thorough. In their religion they have no revivals; no mission weeks to raise them to a fervour which too often passes away with the occasion, leaving the last state worse than the first. What they profess to be they are, consistently and constantly; but they do not make great professions.

The graveyard at Svanike was loaded with flowers. You might almost have thought it decorated for a special occasion, such as the bridal of a favourite village-maiden. It was not so. The people of Svanike, Northern race though they might be, had evidently warm hearts and retentive memories. To them the graves of their dead were holy. The still voice was yet heard, the invisible hand still beckoned. At a newly-made grave where the sod was green and tender, two young girls in black were stooping, working with trowels and planting flowers. There was a sad look in their eyes, and tears overflowed. They were quiet and subdued, and watching those pale, patient faces and quivering lips, one might say that here, at any rate, was no want of sympathy or deep emotion, but an evidence of those profound waters of affection that run silently. They were both pretty, lady-like and refined, dressed as ladies might dress, with close bonnets and well-fitting gowns, well put on; evidently sisters, and so much of a size, height and age, they might have been twins.

The graveyard was itself an evidence of the prosperity of Svanike and its pretensions. Tombstones and monuments abounded. Hitherto, in the small churchyards, modest wooden crosses had chiefly marked where the dead rested, green mounds and daisies, and the blue sky above. Here was the town element and influence. It did not look half so calm and restful. But there was more to occupy the attention, and many of the epitaphs were curious. The abundance of flowers, cut and growing, took from the place its gloom, and one

might almost have said, cheerfully: "Here I, too, would rest after life's fitful fever."

We left one graveyard only to pass to another. Through a long, straggling street, uphill, and far less interesting than the scene we had just been contemplating, we came to a wide tract of barren country, ending in a long stretch of flat coast, where the sea rolled over a sandy beach; rolled and broke and surged. Desolate, stony-looking ground, where the grass was brown and burnt by the sun. A little further on was the field of Runic stones we were in search of. Here, again, we were in the presence of a long past, a prehistoric age. At once we stepped into an ancient world. A great plain, on which were many Runic monuments, some still upright, some fallen from their high estate, like heathen Bethels come to grief—a great, desolate graveyard. If these stones marked the resting-places of the dead, here they had lain for countless ages, ever in sight of that mighty sea with its sad burden of sound. But interesting as was this spot, so full of antiquities and the thoughts they conjured, it had none of the charm of Louiselund. Here were no groves and circles, no trees to cast mysterious shadows. Everything was open to the sky, the free light of the sun and the free winds of heaven, the wide expanse of water, and all the barren and unromantic lands around.

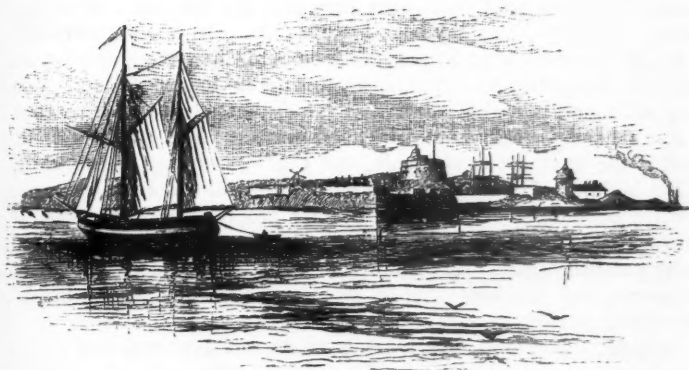
We stayed long, making seats of the fallen stones; huge and coffin-shaped some of them, ripe and ready for a museum. Stayed and listened to the surging of the sea and its everlasting song; tried to realise what this spot had been in the lost ages; what times and cycles and centuries had passed since rude hands had raised these monuments; what the world had then been, and what it would be when another such period had elapsed, and man had outstripped all our present bounds of ordinary and extraordinary wisdom and knowledge.

We left the Runic field, with its melancholy influence, and went back to the town. The quay was in a state of siege and excitement. Everyone had turned out to see the steamer, now coming in. It was evidently crowded, and one trembled for the peace of the town. But it turned out that the greater number on board were going on with the boat to other fields and pastures. Allinge was favoured with only a small portion. The landlady found she had rooms and to spare. The boat was going round to Rønne and other places, and to-morrow would return for those left here to-night.

A goodly-sized steamer, looking, in this small harbour, like a giant in the hands of a pigmy. As long as she remained, she was subjected to a very close inspection from the natives, glad of any small event to vary the monotony of their lives. After an hour's stay, the bell rang thrice, gangways were withdrawn, and she departed, almost as crowded as when she came in. At the end of the little pier we watched her steam away, ploughing up the water, and leaving a long

trail behind. Right and left might be traced a long line of coast ; rocks gradually rising till they became high cliffs. In the immediate neighbourhood, the coast was flat and slippery, and brown rocks, with seaweed and great pools of water, looked suspicious territory.

We crossed them, with slippings and slidings and hair-breadth escapes, occasionally turning inland amongst small, poor fishermen's cottages, where the old wives stood at the doors knitting their everlasting stockings. Very barren the ground looked, on these sea slopes, though there was a struggle for some sort of cultivation going on. Poor and dilapidated were the cottages and the old wives, ragged and very happy the young bare-legged children, that ran wild—for whom the everlasting stockings were evidently not destined. Quite a colony apart from the town seemed these cottages without the



CHRISTIANSO.

boundaries. They seemed to have no part or lot in the prosperity of the little place. The steamer that had come and gone, the daily annals of the place, brought no change or excitement to their lives. They had only to do with their own colony ; their small mutual interests, narrow as their little circle ; wide as the tragedies that too often await those who go down to the sea in ships and occupy their business in great waters. Their hopes and thoughts lay in their husbands and sons and brothers ; in the fishing-nets they helped to make or mend, whilst the stocking rested awhile on the shelf ; in the fishing-boats, which put off day by day, or night by night, wind and weather permitting. Toilers of the deep ; workers of the sea.

We were driven back by the terrible smells that came across these slopes and cuttings and flat, slippery rocks. No doubt they are wholesome, or the neighbourhoods would be desolated, and man cease to be ; vultures would haunt them for a time and then fly to other regions. But wholesome or not, they were too much for us, and

sent us back to Allinge. Even there the air was not perfumed with lavender, yet the place seemed clean and well arranged, and the people were civilised. There was quite a commercial feeling about the place, as if its inhabitants went in for work and activity and reforms. Gardens bloomed about the little houses, and trees overshadowed them. It was quite the most advanced place in Bornholm. Here, in the middle of the town, you were within sight and sound and reach of the pier and harbour, centres of attraction; but at Rønne you had quite a long walk through those primitive, deadlively streets before reaching the sea and the shipping.

The sea walks at Allinge are very fine and interesting, especially when you have passed beyond sight and sound of all inhabited region. Or you may take boat, and paddle about the coast, and inspect the rocks and caves, those grand bulwarks of Nature, so wild and impressive when seen from their base, and the sea tosses your boat about, and throws its spray back in your face. In fine weather, with a steady breeze blowing, you may sail across to Christiansö, and inspect the little place, with its fortifications, that are no longer needed. You may sail round it, and discover that the distant cloud no bigger than a man's hand is really formidable, and quite as much green as white. And if the wind drops suddenly, and the worst comes to the worst, it is a harbour of refuge, and its simple people will make you welcome. But the boatmen about here are weather prophets, and, as a rule, if they are willing to take you out, they are pretty sure of being able to bring you back again. Like all other seas, the Baltic has its share of storms and tempests; but in summer the weather seldom breaks up without warning.

In quiet times, when the hotel is pretty well deserted, and excursion boats are not running, a sojourn at Svanike must not only be bearable but charming. The landlady, Frau Munthe, makes you excessively comfortable. She is quite above the ordinary type of hostesses, has a charmingly quiet voice and manner, and refined ways. For Bornholm it is a very exceptional hotel. Whole families often come from Copenhagen and other places, and stay here for the season.

The sitting-rooms were very pleasant. The sea rolled up to within a few yards of the windows, and stretched out and away in all its expanse and beauty. Sea breezes blew in with life and healing on their wings to all who came from crowded, enervating towns. We felt their influence while lounging at the open windows long after darkness had fallen, and the stars had come out, and the sea was a great invisible expanse, mysterious as the heavens above. We listened to the constant plashing of the water, and watched fishing-boats putting out, until nothing remained of them but their lights. Far away was one solitary bright light, like a distant star or planet: the gleam from the small lighthouse of Christiansö, that on many a tempestuous night has enabled storm-tossed vessels to reach the safe refuge of its haven.

The next morning we entered upon our third and last day's drive, departing when all the freshness of the early hours still lay upon the earth. Not without regret we bade farewell to our hostess, who so singularly combined comfort with simplicity. But there was still much to be done and seen, and we were almost as far from Rönne as one could be on this little island.

To-day's experiences were different from any that had gone before. The sea coast was abandoned and our way lay across the island. The character of the scenery was changed. Hitherto we had journeyed through flat country, very fertile and flourishing, but only wooded here and there near the shore, as at Dyndalen. The scenery was now undulating, and, approaching the interior, beautifully wooded. There were long tracts of forest land through which roads had been cut; wild and desolate almost as an American prairie. At length we reached Almindingen, our morning's resting-place.

An inn in the very heart of this tract of forest land; miles and miles, as it seemed, from any other human habitation. A rude, rough inn, where they give you of their best in the way of fare, and put you up for the night if need be. But if you found yourself alone in an upper room at midnight, shrouded by gloomy trees, your nerves set thrilling by a moaning, murmuring wind amidst the branches, instinctively you would lock or barricade your door. The people of the inn are rough and humble as their surroundings, but they looked honest and willing. Probably they would not have molested you even with doors and windows wide open all through the dark hours. At midnight it must be weird and thrilling enough; at midday it was simply delightful—Eden; Arcady.

Before reaching it we had passed through roads cut out of this beautiful and solitary forest; wild woods and tangle and undergrowth to right and left. Trees sometimes overarching, so that we entered from the sun's glare into restful and luxurious shade. Again, there were plantations of firs, which threw no shade upon the hot, white road, but kept it selfishly for themselves. You might plunge in amongst them and be cool, but the roads between were sandy and glaring. The drive seemed endless. The island appeared suddenly to have expanded to wonderful dimensions. Its aspect was totally changed. We could hardly realize that we were still in Bornholm. Much as we had enjoyed the driving of the last two days, the waving fields of golden corn, the hay-making and the scented clover, all the multiplied signs of prosperity and abundance, this change was inexpressibly grateful. All this green was so soothing to the eye. Had it come first instead of last in the excursion, it would not have seemed half so delightful and refreshing. Beautiful as it was in itself, wild and desolate and limitless as these wooded solitudes were, it was the contrast with what had gone before that made the change stand out with strange and startling effect.

Finally we turned, as it seemed, into the very heart of the wood,

and lo, mysteriously as Jack's beanstalk, which sprang up in a night, we stood before this solitary inn. A large building in its way, roughly furnished. Rooms where nothing but your own footsteps echoed on the bare boards, tread lightly as you would, and where very little light ever seemed to penetrate. But that was the fault of the trees, or the architect, not that the people loved deeds of darkness.

Whilst our humble fare was a-preparing—their resources seemed limited to the farm-yard, and the chicken presently placed before us was even then cackling and laying its plans for the future—whilst, then, murder was being committed and our fare was under process of dressing, we went forth to see the wonders of the valley.

The walk led to Echodalen, the most lovely forest walk imaginable, in unfrequented paths, through the very thick of the forest trees. Now we stood on a height and looked down wild and richly-wooded slopes, made musical by a shallow stream. Wild flowers and fruit abounded—not a few of the trees bore ripe red cherries—until the downward path ended in a long open valley, where cattle grazed, and the stream ran murmuring with cool, refreshing sound. On one hand, deep forests tempting one to stray out of the right path; on the other, abrupt and precipitous cliffs, bare of everything but moss and time-honoured lichen; the only rugged signs of unproductive nature in all this luxuriance of wood and vale and pasture. This was Echodalen, though we never found the echo.

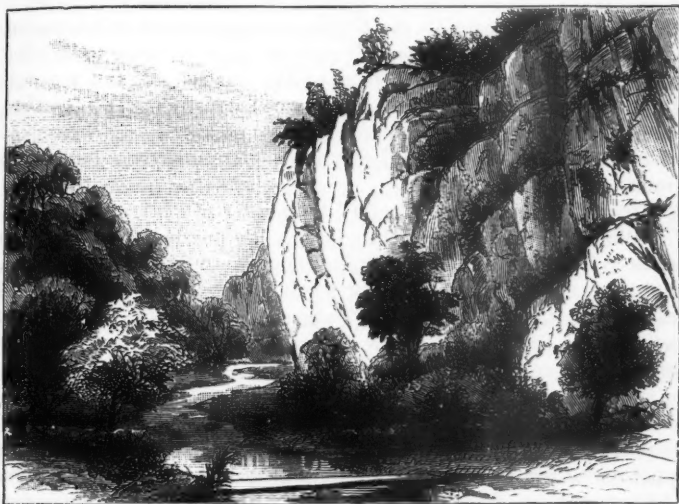
We went up the steep cliffs, still in the shadow and shade of the endless woods. We were utterly alone, no sight or sound of life, and trusted to chance to take us back to that lonely inn, where by this time our chicken had had its destiny cut short, had sung its swan's song. Ever ascending through the limitless forest any number of specimens of ferns and wild flowers, known and unknown, were at our command, if we could only have preserved them.

At last a tower on the highest ground, and a glorious view from it. The whole of Bornholm seemed disclosed at one glance. All the waving fields of corn, the distant ruins of Hammershuus; all the landmarks we had passed; the circular churches, from a distance more warlike than ecclesiastical. And all round, the glorious sea, a shimmering sapphire sheet of water, Christiansö afar off. At our feet acres and acres of wood and forest, hills and valleys; an ocean of green, restless and waving and swaying as the distant ocean itself.

At the foot of the tower was a wide forest road, broad enough to admit half-a-dozen chariots abreast, green and mossy underfoot. On either side, the forest thicket, leading to unknown regions, or to regions impenetrable. The road was long and led out into the world, away from forest life and scenes. This was not what we wanted, so we plunged into the thick of the wood down a tempting by-path. We passed numerous cherry trees, and a ruin of which we could not

read the interpretation, romantic dells and craggy rocks that looked like ruined castles in themselves.

Presently, we hardly knew how, we found ourselves at our solitary inn. They had laid our table under the trees. It was a charming dining-room. For ceiling we had the branches of spreading oaks and elms, for decoration the blue sky beyond. Our carpet was of moss, and we had unceasing music in the free and friendly winds that rustled the leaves and sang in the branches. What mattered that the fare was humble, our couch a bare bench, our table a wooden board on tressels? What mattered that dry bread was our



ALMINDINGEN.

ambrosia and sparkling ale of the mildest our nectar? Kings in their palaces might envy us, and all those who after us shall go and do likewise.

After this feast of chicken and this flow of ale, we still had leisure. Jehu evidently appreciated his quarters, for he declared that we might yet linger for an hour or two. We were nothing loth. The charms of Rønne a hundred times multiplied could not compare with these wild and solitary woods. So we wandered away into by-paths, lone and unfrequented. Sylvan glades, bird and squirrel haunted. Snake haunted too, for every now and then, gliding and writhing through the moss, we saw, with a certain thrill, a green creature raise its small head and shoot out a forked tongue, and then hurry away to its hole. E., strong young Norwegian though he was, could burn the student's midnight oil, and grow familiar with the Classics, but could not grow accustomed to the sight of a snake.

Whenever and wherever we came across these small, creeping, dangerous looking vipers, the effect was the same. He would stand and tremble and turn pale, and seemed spell-bound and powerless. Happily they are only too glad to get away from you, and will not attack you unless first meddled with or alarmed or trodden upon by accident.

And what vitality they have in their small bodies. I remember once, walking through the beautiful grounds of Robert Were Fox, of Penjerrick—whose *Reminiscences* in the *Journal* of Caroline Fox have given pleasure to so many. He and my beloved late Rector of Falmouth were having an eloquent and animated discussion, to which I was listening with the delight of appreciation and the veneration due from youth to age. It was not given to many to be often in the company of two such men of the old school, and my dear Rector is now almost the last of his race: courtly amidst courtiers, the counsellor of prelates and the intimate of kings. As we walked we came upon one of the gardeners looking curiously at a hole in the ground.

"What have you found?" asked the master of Penjerrick.

"Well, sir," said the gardener, "I'm fairly puzzled. I chopped a snake in half just now, as he was springing into his hole. The first half jumped down, and the second half jumped clean after it. If I hadn't seen it, sir, I should have believed it impossible." This was delivered in the broad Cornish dialect we will not attempt; and we left the man still looking into the hole, as if he expected the snake to reappear, whole and undivided.

To return to Almindingen. We escaped all contact with our natural enemies. Wandered through the forest glades and lingered beside quiet pools, and came upon two trees that had wedded and become one—an oak and an ash—so that looking upward you saw a mingling of two kinds of leaves, apparently on the same branch. The silence and solitude were perfect. We met no one, and apparently had the woods to ourselves. Time passed, until we felt that we must linger no longer. Jehu evidently was of the same opinion, for on returning to the inn, we found that he had harnessed his cattle, and was making the place echo with whip cracks. We left with sorrow. The honest people came and wished us a pleasant drive; the fowls in the barn-yard were chanting a requiem over a missing member—a poultry wake in a far-off land. We passed under the spreading branches, and the carriage bowled away silently over smooth, soft turf. For some distance we still found ourselves in forest scenes. Then all passed away, the last glade, the last tree. We looked back with regret—as we so often look back in life. Four hours of unspeakable pleasure and delight had passed amidst these solitary and sylvan glades. We should have no more like them in Bornholm.

Once more a scene of fertility and abundance. Waving cornfields, and barns receiving wagon-loads of hay; great storehouses for future

use. We passed through Aakirkeby, the only inland town or village we had seen: the only one, I believe, that exists in Bornholm. It was singularly quaint and pretty. Its houses were nearly all painted rose colour, and many of them stood singly, dotted about the land outside the boundaries of the village. They were quite large and flourishing, standing in gardens blooming with great tree-fuchsias and blazing with geraniums, whilst roses and old-fashioned flowers scented the air. The delicate colour of the houses seemed to throw a feeling of endless festivity over the place, as if it was reserved only for the pleasant sides of life—*les beaux jours de la vie*. The church was old and singular; but the sexton, away haymaking, had been too wise in his generation to leave the doors open.

A boy from a chemist's shop went off in search of him with the greatest readiness. It took him at least a quarter of an hour to find the absentee. When he returned we were anxious to thank and reward him for so much service and civility. But the lad, coming down the churchyard with the sexton, who was blacksmith as well as haymaker, seemed to divine our intention, and with a delicacy which did him honour, he took off his cap and slipped away through a gate on the other side. How such natures go direct to one's heart. Just the lad and just the nature one delights to encounter, and would like to uphold and advance through life, and do one's best to keep unspoiled by the world. We saw him no more, but he dwells in the memory for ever.

The haymaker, sexton and blacksmith in one, advanced with his great keys and an apology for his absence. He could not be in two places at once, and everyone went haymaking who could do so. He threw wide the doors, and pointed to some Runic stones in the porch; how there, or why, or when, no one knew. There was an old font with Runic inscriptions, roughly carved, but interesting for its antiquity. The small interior was cut up by pillars and arches and arcades, all whitewashed like every other church in this part of the world; but built, the old blacksmith declared, of black marble. There were some extraordinary head-dresses upon the communion table, fearfully and wonderfully made, reposing in front of lighted candles. The old man gave us a reason for their being here rather than in a museum of antiquities. I forget his reason: a burial, or a bridal, or a penance: I think the former. They belonged to the most illustrious lady of the neighbourhood, and were to be there for a certain number of days.

The square tower had four stories, and of course we mounted them all, a narrowing, suffocating experience. The old sexton threw wide the creaking shutters and let in daylight upon darkness, whilst we looked upon the world around from the four points of the compass. The quaint and lively village at our feet; Rønne on the one side, our beloved Almindingen on the other, with its forest groves and glades; Svanike, which we had left that morning. Quite a far off time

it seemed, so much had we since seen and done. In the distance, and hardly distinguishable, were the ruins of Hammershuus. We wondered how the Frenchman who had held a cow reception had fared, and how far he had gone on his travels. He was taking things quietly, and perhaps was still at Hammershuus, meditating amongst the ruins. Or he might even have reached Hasle, and be making acquaintance with its brown people. The old sexton pointed it out, but all shades were lost in the distance. If everything there was brown, here, at any rate, all things were *couleur de rose*. And if our youthful messenger was to be taken as an example of the inhabitants, they were richly gifted in graces also. But he was surely an exception to the general rule. It would be too great delight to come upon a whole community of such natures.

Yet our old sexton was an exception too, and almost courtly in manner. When we left, he accompanied us to the carriage, and stood outside the churchyard gate, hat in hand, with the unconscious attitude of good breeding, dismissing us with a bow that was quite dignified. Was he a Harmonious Blacksmith, and had his music refined him? Or was it inborn? Or are the people of Aakirkeby really and truly a race apart? The three, at any rate, with whom we came into contact were so: the chemist, his boy, and the old haymaking, blacksmith sexton.

We went our way, gradually approaching Rønne and the end of our drive. Three days to be remembered; three days of uninterrupted sunshine and happiness. An island that stands out above most others; to which we would gladly some day return, quiet and simple as are its attractions. There is a charm about it very difficult to interpret: difficult to define even whilst it is under experience. It is like a subtle perfume, ever there, yet ever vanishing. The troubles of life were forgotten; one's heart overflowed with happiness. Days passed gilded with sunshine that found a reflection in one's brain, spread a glamour over one's vision, seemed to run through one's veins. Whatever it might be, there was the influence, never for one moment absent during those three memorable days.

No wonder that we entered Rønne almost with feelings of depression. "All that's bright must fade, the brightest still the fleetest." Jehu spoilt himself and his three days' civility by charging half as much again as he had bargained for. Boots upheld him, and the inn people ranged themselves on his side. They were the only bad specimens we met with in all the island. There was nothing for it but to yield to his unjust demand. We could not dispute or fight it out; we would not let it disturb our three days' happiness. But we warned Jehu that cheating never prospers, and that the way of transgressors is hard. By this time he had the money in hand, and did not seem to mind the lecture. Perhaps he was born without a conscience, and was to be pitied. We could not examine him phrenologically, and his face was not that of a man born to evil ways. Yet

there was a cunning look in his eyes, as he went off counting his hoard in company with Boots, who for his part had a face that would have done credit to Madame Tussaud's Room of Horrors. We should not wonder if he came to be hanged some day, unless he was born to be drowned. The two disappeared in the sheds that formed one side of the courtyard, and there they evidently divided their spoil.

Rönne looked the same as when we had left it, only that then we had seen it in morning sunshine, and now the afternoon shadows were lengthening. The streets were deserted; the little square also. It was difficult to kill time.

But evening fell, and about nine o'clock we went down to the harbour. The boat was getting up steam. The pier was crowded. There was nothing but talking and shouting and demonstrative farewells repeated for the twentieth time. At ten o'clock down came the mails. A few moments after, the gangway was withdrawn. We steamed out of the harbour. The little crowd grew indistinct. Rönne fell away.

For us, Bornholm was over. A spot to remain green for ever in the memory, a treasure island. We launched out into deep waters. The lighthouse flashed its beacon long after everything else had faded. Under the stars we thought over all we had seen and gone through. The present darkness made the remembrance of all that past sunshine, those sea-girt cliffs, those fields ripening to harvest, only the more vivid and the more abiding.



MRS. DOBBS'S WHIM.

MR. and Mrs. Dobbs lived at Clapham. They were a very worthy couple, their friends said. That is about the best people will say of an elderly pair, if they are not intellectual or troublesome. Mr. and Mrs. Dobbs were neither. Mr. Dobbs was stout and commonplace in appearance, and he did not flirt with his neighbour's wife, or gamble in stocks, or live beyond his income. He was hall-marked amongst upright men, and was trustee for half his friends' children. No doubt he was a trifle heavy and prosy at times, but these are drawbacks frequently attendant on men of probity. He certainly was never tempted by impulses or inspirations of any sort either to do wrong or to become witty and original.

Mrs. Dobbs was reputed a respectable and virtuous matron for other reasons. Imprimis, she had no taste in dress; neither did she paint her face, or excite the envy and spite of her female friends by beautifying her house. She was fond of a good dinner of a solid English sort, and always wore black silk or satin gowns. Her caps were preposterous erections of lace with gilt or steel ornaments attached; and when she went to the theatre she wore a red bernouse. Truly this couple were left behind in the race of extravagance, frivolity, and eccentricity. Fashionable folks would have nothing to say to them; those who did consider them worth cultivating explained their status as "good worthy people," with a compassionate shrug or smile.

Mr. Dobbs was "something in the City," and his big office and many clerks brought in something more than a comfortable income. Yet he made no parade of wealth and kept household accounts strictly. Every evening he returned home punctually by the six o'clock train from Waterloo, carrying his fish-basket with him. Fish was better and cheaper in the City than at Clapham, and Mrs. Dobbs was particularly fond of fish. The worthy Josiah would not have spoilt her dinner for the world. She must have her salmon in season, and her red mullet and whitebait, all in due turn, of the best.

By this you will understand that Mr. Dobbs was devoted and domestic. Yet there were thorns amidst the roses of his conjugal Paradise. Mrs. Dobbs was now and again beset by spirits of unrest and discontent, and her whims at intervals caused dear, steady-going Josiah much inconvenience.

There were no children at Clarence Villa; and perhaps for this reason Mrs. Dobbs had more leisure for complaint. She practised the art of murmuring with as steady persistence as a prima donna her scales. Josiah suffered her discontents with more than the ordinary patience of an exemplary husband.

As years went on Josiah philosophically gave up wishing for an heir, seeing his Dorothy had grown portly and middle-aged. He subscribed largely to various charities, not having a legitimate outlet for his human kindness. A philoprogenitive organ impelled him towards children's hospitals. Why, said he, should not his generation benefit by his benevolence instead of they that were to come after?

Mrs. Dobbs did not, however, view such matters with equanimity. Seeing the undue and unwelcome number of olive branches round about other people's tables, she resented Nature's cruelty to herself. She therefore frowned persistently on Josiah's philanthropic schemes for other people's children. His benevolence towards orphans, foundlings, and waifs and strays was a never-ceasing cause of argument and mortification to her. Yet she did not suffer any loss personally from these charitable deeds. Not a wish remained ungranted, and cheques were forthcoming with cheerful readiness when required. She had her carriage, her servants, her milliners, and her pleasures as she listed. Josiah erected a miniature Crystal Palace in his garden, because she wished to have bananas growing. He took her to Egypt one winter, and nearly died of sea-sickness by the way, because she had been reading Eastern romances and yearned for Oriental glitter. Nothing that money could obtain was denied her. Only she had no children.

For a long time now Mrs. Dobbs had displayed no extraordinary caprice. Josiah was sailing along in wonderfully smooth matrimonial waters. But the lady's frequent absence of mind and contemplative mien might have convinced a more sophisticated man that mischief was brewing. In truth, Mrs. Dobbs was slowly hatching a scheme which she felt sure would run counter to Josiah's wishes. This lent an additional zest to her plan. She considered it a retributive scheme. She would fight Josiah on his own ground with his own favourite weapon of benevolence.

"I'm going to adopt a child, Josiah. Now, it's no use your contradicting me, because I won't listen," said the lady one evening over dessert. She spoke aggressively, cracking the shell of a walnut with decision. She had peevishly found fault with the fish and the salad, and had slapped her pug for no earthly reason. If Josiah had been rather less slow he would have opined that a storm was brewing. There was silence for a minute after Mrs. Dobbs had opened fire.

"Aren't you going to speak?" she said at length.

"A child?" remarked Josiah, dropping his fat chin into his shirt. "My love, that is surely a project requiring very serious consideration."

Mrs. Dobbs tossed her head ominously. Every inch of lace in her cap seemed suddenly to have acquired starch, while the gilt ornaments thereon scintillated fiercely.

"When I say a thing I mean it, as you know, Josiah. I have

considered that you indulge your hobbies without restraint. It is high time my benevolence found something to occupy it."

Josiah drank up his wine slowly. When he spoke again it was in a subdued tone.

"Dorothy, my dear, how often have I reminded you in the past three years that your poor sister—left a child. As I have said before, it is your clear duty to ——"

"Mr. Dobbs!" The lady rose, and swept her black satin skirts to the door. Here she paused to add: "I repeat, I remember no sister. A disgraceful marriage severed all connection of birth. I beg that you will never allude to that shameful matter again."

Perhaps the episode alluded to was well remembered of Josiah, for he sighed several times in his after-dinner solitude. He knew the madcap girl he had sheltered for many years beneath his roof was dead, but he knew, too, that her child lived, and he would fain have cherished it for the mother's sake.

In the course of the evening Mrs. Dobbs resumed the question of adoption. Josiah was a peaceable man, and he loved his wife; but this last whim was a serious one, and would inevitably entangle her in difficulties.

"I'm going to advertise at once," she said.

Mr. Dobbs looked very blank.

"I should advise you to try some other plan that would give less publicity to the matter," he said, mildly. "That would bring any amount of beggars and impostors about you."

Mrs. Dobbs looked over her crewel work in an injured way.

"There you are again, Josiah; always trying to oppose me and make my life miserable. I declare you contradict me every morning and evening about something. Haven't I told you before what a lonely life I lead? It's all very well for you, who go away to the City every day and enjoy yourself making money. You are just like all men—you are selfish to the core." With this final female platitude, Mrs. Dobbs began to whimper. Mr. Dobbs felt guilty of heinous cruelty.

"A companion might ——" he began.

The lady lifted herself from the sofa cushion and Josiah quailed.

"A companion!" with withering sarcasm, "to make love to you, no doubt, Josiah. I know their scheming ways. Didn't I have enough of Miss Griggs and her manoeuvring tricks, working you braces, the hussy, and sending you Christmas cards. How dare you mention a person of that sort after all my sufferings with them?"

Of course in the end the lady prevailed, and Josiah passively countenanced the adoption. Matters were soon set in order for the fulfilment of the latest whim.

Yet verily her heart failed her during the week following her advertisement. Her lonely condition had never been so apparent to her before as when she was beset by a crew of parents and guardians

bearing some puny or blighted infant for her adoption. All sorts and conditions of men and women craved her pity for their wretched children. She was bewildered by the questions put to her, and terrified by the offensive bearing of bolder applicants.

More than once Mrs. Dobbs had to ring in her respectable butler to get rid of some insistent parent who endeavoured to intimidate her into an immediate purchase.

The result of all this was a cessation of the daily advertisement. Mr. Dobbs, of course, was not informed minutely of all that went on; though an interview with his butler one evening threw a little light on things that had occurred.

"I wish to give a month's warning, sir," said this gentleman, in privacy to his master.

"Why, now, Tinker, what is the matter? I'm sure you've a very comfortable place, with a boy to do all your dirty work."

Tinker coughed and stammered a few words before coming to the point. "Well, now, sir, to speak plain, it's along of that wild crowd of vagabonds as Mrs. Dobbs she's seeing of every day. Babies by the score, they're brought by impident rascals such as I ain't been accustomed to. One of 'em she wouldn't go out of the gate till I called the police. It ain't respectable in a gentleman's house, I do assure you, sir."

Somehow or other Mr. Dobbs managed to soothe the outraged feelings of his man-servant, and prevailed upon him to put up awhile longer with the inconveniences of the situation. The worthy Josiah was concerned for the protection of his wife.

"How are you getting on with your business, my love?" enquired Mr. Dobbs, that evening.

"Oh, pretty well," said the lady, cheerfully, yet persistently avoiding her husband's eye. "I find it very difficult to make up my mind; and I want a pretty little boy, not quite a baby, with no disgraceful connections to hang about him. No doubt I shall see one to suit me in a few days."

The few days passed without further allusion to the subject, and the following curious advertisement appeared in all the daily papers:

"Wanted, for immediate adoption, a little boy between two and four years old. Must be healthy and pretty, and sound in body and mind. The parents or relatives must surrender all claim upon him for ever. He will be comfortably provided for in the future. Apply daily, to Messrs. Griffham and Grabham, Solicitors, 201, Parliament Street, Westminster."

After the appearance of this advertisement, the persecution at Clarence Villa gradually died away, and only now and again a respectable man or woman, leading a little boy, was heard enquiring for Mrs. Dobbs's residence, of a local policeman. But the lady was obdurate to all claims made on her pity. She had hardened her heart to destitute cases; and penniless widows or consumptive fathers

met with scant ceremony at her hands if their offspring were not desirable.

After this had gone on for a fortnight or more, Mrs. Dobbs one day visited Messrs. Griffham and Grabham during business hours.

"I have come about the child, Mr. Griffham," she said, going at once to her point. "How is it you have sent me none that are pretty or interesting?" From the force of habit, Mrs. Dobbs was apt to speak dictatorially to strangers.

"My dear madam, pray remember children are not made to order."

Mrs. Dobbs winced. "I see I must expect no assistance from you, sir," she said, loftily. "No doubt my husband's opposition to my project has influenced you. I will trouble you no further in this matter. You may consider your quest at an end. Good morning."

Weary of her undertaking, Mrs. Dobbs had almost resolved to abandon her whim. She chewed the cud of bitter thoughts on her homeward way that day. Providence or fortune was against her success.

That evening Mr. Dobbs came home with an unusual degree of haste, and of a cheerful mien.

"My love," he said, tripping over the dining-room mat, "I've found a child for you."

Mrs. Dobbs looked up coldly. "It's impossible I shall like it," she said, perversely. "No one wants to part with a child unless there's something the matter with it."

Mr. Dobbs beamed yet more brightly. He was not to be subdued by any wet blankets. "It's a little boy, and he is three years old, fair, pretty and most intelligent. His father is just dead."

"What about the mother?" questioned Mrs. Dobbs, cautiously.

Josiah reddened, stammering a little. "She—ah, poor soul—is dead too. This is no beggar's brat. He is well-born, Dorothy, on one side. I can give you every proof."

The next day the child was brought to Clapham, and left at Clarence Villa by a clerk from Mr. Dobbs's office. He was poorly dressed, but a handsome little lad, lively and spirited. He was not at all shy, and addressed himself freely to the pug and parrot. The piping, treble voice, and shrill, childish laughter touched the maternal chord in Dorothy's heart. She went a little sadly that day while her eyes followed the child. He stroked her velvet gown, and fingered her rings, while he sat upon her knee, chattering about the things around him.

"What is your name?" questioned the lady.

"Harry," answered the boy readily. But nothing more could be elicited from him. He did not seem to understand that he could have a second name. He was but a baby-boy, scarcely three.

In the afternoon Mrs. Dobbs telegraphed to her husband that he must make arrangements for her to keep the child a day or two. It

would not be necessary to send anyone to fetch him that evening. The day passed quickly, with little feet pattering beside her, exploring the wonders of garden and greenhouses.

Towards seven o'clock Mrs. Dobbs began to look anxiously for her spouse's return. She had quite decided she would keep the child, but still there were questions to be asked—preliminaries to be settled. The little boy must be hers entirely. None must ever claim him, or interfere with his welfare.

Mr. Dobbs came leisurely up the garden at his usual hour, carrying his fish-bag. His stolid face changed a little when he looked through the window and saw the child upon his wife's knee.

"He is a pretty boy, Dorothy," he said nervously when he came near.

"A darling little boy. I mean to keep him, Josiah," she said, gently disengaging the chubby hands from her chain. "Will you stay with me, Harry?"

The child laughed gleefully, tossing back his curls.

"Stay with oo; pity, pity flowers," he cried, clapping his hands.

"Tell me all you know about him, Josiah. What is his parentage, and will his nearest relatives surrender all claim upon him?"

Josiah shifted uneasily on his seat. He had the appearance of a man oppressed with guilt.

"He is an orphan," said he, looking speculatively at his own broad toes.

"So much the better for me," said Mrs. Dobbs. "But I will not have any distant relatives hanging about. He must belong exclusively to me."

Mr. Dobbs drew nearer to his wife.

"Dorothy, he ought to belong to you, if to anyone."

The lady put down the child from her knee. His large blue eyes gazed in wonder at this sudden rejection.

"What is the boy's name?" said Mrs. Dobbs, breathlessly.

"Henry," he rejoined slowly.

"But, Henry what?" she asked more sharply.

"Henry Morrison. He is your sister's child—a friendless orphan now. God help him, if you don't."

Mrs. Dobbs fell back on the sofa cushion, and covered her face with her hands. The tears were falling through them when little fingers essayed to move them.

"Has oo been naughty? Don't ky."

Perhaps the lady was very conscious of her own naughtiness, for she cried still more at this appeal, drawing the child into her embrace.

There was never any more doubt about the adoption. Henry Morrison calls Mrs. Dobbs mother at this day, and Josiah is a little less generous towards asylums and hospitals. There will be a very pretty penny by and by for his adopted son.

H. M.

THROUGH THE WATERS.

My days are numbered now,
 In pain and weariness must they decline ;
 And what availeth it, O Love, that thou
 Wouldst give thy life for mine ?

Like to the ebbing tide,
 The world rolls back and leaves me stranded here ;
 As a lone wreck when angry waves subside,
 Nor hope nor aid is near.

Now doth a mist arise
 Between me and the fading things of earth ;
 Those transient joys that we so vainly prize,
 I learn, at last, their worth.

Oh, sweeter is the thought
 Of every cross which, following Christ, I bore ;
 Of trials mine, and weary labour wrought
 For His dear sake of yore.

Ah, though imperfect all
 Our service, yet will God accept the same ;
 And what is given of our substance small
 In the Redeemer's name.

Where sorrows, deepening, loom,
 The valley of the shadow dread I see.
 O Father, be Thou nigh, amid the gloom,
 If my heart faileth me.

Lo, One, who for us passed
 The grave and gate of death, hath swept away
 Their terrors, and upon the darkness cast
 Light from eternal day !

M. T.



Like to the ebbing tide,
The world rolls back and leaves me stranded here.

NOT YET SOLVED.

THE following is a true ghost story. It is an account of some supernatural incidents which have recently taken place in a clergyman's house situated in a favourite London suburb. They are so strange as to be thought worthy of publication, and are here given by one of the daughters of the house.

What I am about to relate is quite true in all the main facts, and I make the story known as being another of the many instances which prove that links undeniably exist between the spiritual and the material world.

There neither was nor is anything gloomy about the house. It became our home many years ago on account of its being the only available house to suit us near my father's church. When my father took the house it had been built about three years. During that time it was occupied by a Captain somebody (whose name I forget), his wife and little child, a girl. But the child had then died suddenly, it was said under very painful circumstances, and the parents were so distressed that they threw up the lease of the house and went away, and my father took it.

There was nothing gloomy, I have said, about the house. Neither was there any apparent reason why all of us children should shun a particular bedroom in it, which stood on the first landing, immediately over the dining-room, looking out into the street. It was a spacious, airy room, nothing whatever to be seen amiss with it; nevertheless, we little ones, from the eldest to the youngest, felt an unaccountable fear of it. It was in vain that our nurse and Aunt Jane, who, between them, supplied the place of the mother we had lost, strove to re-assure us, saying there was nothing to fear. We did fear the room, and could not help it.

This unreasonable fear was, no doubt, augmented by one curious fact, which had been observed from the time we first entered the house. Constantly, and more especially during the Spring and Autumn time, the stone staircase, of which the first flight was composed, and which led on to the landing of the before-mentioned bedroom, seemed to be perpetually promenaded at night by small, pattering feet, as of a small child ceaselessly toiling up and down. Indeed, on our instalment in the house, nurse, who had reason to suspect one of my brothers of the bad habit of walking in his sleep, would rise from her bed, and descend, candle in hand, with a warm shawl ready to wrap round the little sleep-walker.

The first time, not finding him, and thinking she had somehow missed him, she talked to him the next day, saying: "He might catch

his death of cold, stepping up and down them bare stone stairs." The stairs were not carpeted, owing to a whim of my father's.

But soon, to her amazement, nurse found the sounds were not caused by him; on each occasion she found him asleep in bed. But the pattering footsteps continued to be heard by all of us. After many conjectures as to the cause of the sounds, Aunt Jane and nurse ceased to talk of them, at least, in our hearing, apparently paying them no attention. Indeed, in time we all grew accustomed to them, and never gave them much thought, except when visitors were staying in the house. The sounds disturbed them, and they would now and then make a remark on the restless nature of the young members of the household, "who appeared to prefer walking up and down stairs at night to resting in bed."

But to the bedroom we never did get reconciled. As we grew older, Aunt Jane reasoned with us, saying how very wrong it was to give way to superstition and fears, especially when the fears were groundless. To this day the sensation remains with us.

Thus the years went on.

One afternoon, as we were all gathered together for afternoon tea, a message was brought to Aunt Jane that a workman, then employed on the premises, wished to speak with her. Aunt Jane still stayed with us, notwithstanding my being now old enough to take my mother's place, as far as the housekeeping was concerned. The man was engaged in cleaning out a cistern at the extreme top of the house. "What does he want with me?" asked Aunt Jane, but the servant did not know.

So Aunt Jane went out to him. On her return, she held a very long, thin, and dirty-looking chain in her hand, which the workman had discovered in the cistern, it having, he said, in some extraordinary way, become wedged into a crack at one side, from which place he had extricated it. Aunt Jane rewarded the man for his honesty in bringing the chain to her; though whose it could possibly be and how it got there was an utter mystery. She thought the chain was gold.

My two brothers, both at the tea-table, pronounced the chain to be brass, and expressed their delight that Aunt Jane had been for once taken in, and had given five shillings for a worthless article. She strove to impress upon them that she had not given the man five shillings for the chain, which was none of his, but for his straightforward honesty.

Upon taking the chain to a jeweller's to be cleaned, we learned that it was a very fine Indian chain of pure gold, and of most delicate handicraft; which only served to increase the mystery of how it got into the place where it was found, and of how long it had lain there, hidden from the light of day.

When, a few days later, it was returned to us from the jeweller,

glittering and clean, it was passed from one to another in wondering admiration, and shown to my father, who, until then, had only heard of its discovery, and had greatly pooh-poohed the idea of the chain being of any value.

"Found in the cistern at the top of the house!" he exclaimed, as we turned the beautiful thing about in our hands. "That is most extraordinary!"

"I always said this was an uncanny house," cried Ethel, the second of us, speaking upon impulse. "All those unexplainable sounds of little footsteps for ever pattering up and down that stone staircase, and the curious feeling we have all had since we were little mites of shrinking from that front bedroom! It would not surprise me if a ghost were to turn up next."

"Don't talk nonsense," rebuked my father. "We shall not keep a servant in the place if you begin to talk like that."

"Well, at any rate," went on the unabashed Ethel, "how on earth did a fine long Indian chain, such as this, find its way into the top cistern?"

"That is the strange part of it," said my brother Jack, who was minutely examining the chain. "It is of value, this chain. What is to be done with it?"

"I shall wear it," struck in Lily, the youngest of us, and consequently the most indulged. "I've just got a watch given to me, you know, and as I want a chain to wear with it, I'll take this one. If any owner claims it later, I can give it up to him."

"The question is, to whom *does* it belong?" cried Jack. "The man thought it had been in the crack of that cistern for years."

Aunt Jane, struck by a thought, laid down her knitting—she was always knitting—and turned to my father, to speak.

"I should think it must have belonged to those people who lived in the house before you had it. The chain is an Indian chain; and they were said, were they not, to have come from India."

"Yes, I believe so," he replied, "if my memory serves me correctly."

"What did you hear about them?"

"Not much," he answered. "They had taken a long lease of the house, and had been in it about three years when their little girl died suddenly. After that, they gave up the lease, and I took it."

"How did she die? What of?" asked Aunt Jane.

"I do not know. It was said that the circumstances attending the death were painful, and that the parents were so cut up at the loss they could not stay in the place. Their grief would naturally be great, she having been an only child. I think they went abroad," added he. "Anyway, that is all I recollect to have heard of them."

Aunt Jane took up her knitting again. She thought the chain must have belonged to those people: and she wondered what it was that had caused the death of the little girl.

Lily was allowed to take the chain into wear; and our busy conjectures respecting it and its mysterious discovery gradually died away.

Shortly afterwards, a cousin of ours, from the country, took up his abode with us for a time, for the purpose of studying medicine, being intended for the medical profession. He was a jolly young Englishman, not much more than a lad, with an excellent appetite, and no imagination at all. As to any superstitious tale, had he been told one, he would have laughed it to pieces.

When a certain shyness, attendant on his first arrival, had worn off, Charley became a great addition to our circle, and his proverbial good temper soon made him a general favourite.

One bright spring morning, however, he appeared at breakfast in a different mood. After sitting some time in grumpy silence, he, to our amazement, burst out with a vehement attack on practical jokes.

What absurd folly such jokes were, he said, as if *he* could ever be taken in by them! "So mind, Lena," he went on, pouncing suddenly round on me, "don't you try it on again. You know how I hate young kids of children!"

I asked him what he meant. The rest of them, sitting round, gazed at him, wondering what had come to good-humoured Charley.

"Because you may happen to have a child staying in the house, it's no reason why you girls should send it into my room in the night, just to play a trick on me."

We assured him we had done nothing of the kind.

"You must have done so," said Charley. "Dressed it up in white, with its golden hair round its face. Whose child is it? One comfort, it must have caught a jolly cold, standing all that time looking at itself in the glass!"

"My dear Charley!" exclaimed I, "what on earth are you talking about? There's no child staying here."

"Oh, isn't there!" grumbled he; "and you didn't send her into my room, thinking to startle me?"

"A little girl, you say?"—humouring him.

"A little girl about four years old, all in white, with lots of golden hair," he repeated. "As if you wanted to be told!"

"Charley, believe me: there's no little girl staying in the house; nor was one sent into your room."

"I dare say not! Why, Lena, I lay awake full half an hour, watching her. She stood by the dressing-table, looking at something in her hand."

"Did you see her come in?" I asked. I could not understand this at all. Charley was in desperate earnest.

"No, I didn't," he answered. "What roused me suddenly, I don't know; something did, and I sat up to look at my watch. It was just five o'clock; light enough for me to see everything in the room distinctly; and my eyes at once fell upon the child standing at the dressing-table."

"Charley, you must have had a dream—or a nightmare."

"I wish you'd not talk nonsense," he angrily returned. "I was as wide awake as I am now. Don't I tell you I watched the child for half an hour. When I got tired of sitting up in bed, I lay down and watched her. She was still there when I fell asleep."

"Did you speak to her?"

"Not I!" cried Charley. "I'd not give you girls the satisfaction you were no doubt all listening for, outside. If you weren't there yourselves, you had posted old nurse there, I know."

Nothing more was said then, for Charley had to hasten away to his daily work at the hospital. In fact, we got no more out of him on the subject at all. Our suggestion, that it was a dream, he would not listen to; and it took the whole household several days to convince him, or, perhaps, try to, that no child was or had been in the house.

Charley's bedroom was the uncanny room on the first landing, but we had never told him our dread of it. Not only that it would have been wrong to do so, but that we had grown a little ashamed of the feeling which yet we could not conquer.

It was, I think, about a year afterwards—and we had forgotten the occurrence—that the figure was seen again. One evening, when Lily and I, having lingered a little behind the others in saying good-night, were preparing to mount to our particular nest at the top of the house, Ethel called me into her little room, saying she wanted to speak to me. It was next to the one Charles had slept in, and faced my brother's room at the other end of the long, straight landing. The gas was burning brightly on the staircase. Jack's door stood half-open, showing that his gas was also fully on. I went into Ethel's room, Lily waiting for me outside; but a minute had hardly elapsed ere she called out quickly, in a low, sharp voice:

"Come here, Lena; make haste!"

I was reading a letter Ethel had just put into my hand, so I answered shortly: "In a minute!"

"Make haste!" she cried again. "Be quick!"

I ran out, rather impatiently, to find Lily gazing hard at Jack's door, with a strange, fixed look in her eyes.

"I have just seen the little girl Charles saw," she said, solemnly. "She was looking straight at me, dressed all in white, and she had such lovely golden hair! When you came, she vanished."

Nothing was to be seen then. We looked around, no one stirring. Ethel had joined us.

"Lily," spoke Ethel, presently, "perhaps she was looking at the gold chain: you have it on."

The chain was quite conspicuous outside Lily's dress. She repeated again that the little girl had stood gazing at her. Charles, we remembered, had said she did not look at him, but was all the time looking

apparently at something in her hand. Lily had not felt any fear. The golden hair, she declared, was perfectly beautiful.

"This is really very strange," exclaimed Aunt Jane, who, hearing our voices, had appeared on the scene to know what the talking was about. "Are you quite sure, Lily, of what you say?"

"Of course I am sure," returned Lily, who never could bear to be doubted, and was very matter-of-fact and truthful. "The little girl stood there gazing at me, aunt. She was as plainly to be seen as we are to one another."

"We were wondering, aunt, whether she could be looking at the chain which Lily has on," said Ethel. Perhaps she recognised it? You know, when the chain was found, we thought it might possibly have belonged to the people who were in the house before us." Which, of course, as Aunt Jane observed, was as much as to suggest that this little girl with the mass of golden hair might be the apparition of the child who had died in the house.

We talked of it as the days went on, suggesting all kinds of possibilities and impossibilities. As she had never appeared until after the discovery of the chain, we could but think the chain might in some way or other be connected with her, and that, if the chain had, indeed, belonged to the first occupiers of the house, the little spirit might well be that of the child who had died there. Another question we asked ourselves was: Could the chain, or its loss, have had aught to do with her death?

The story spread, and people came to see the room and passage where the little figure had appeared; but it was sometime before it was seen again. Lily was married. She had left home and taken the chain with her.

Ethel was climbing slowly up the stone staircase one Sunday evening between seven and eight o'clock, when she saw the little white figure, crowned with its mass of golden curls, peeping through the banisters on the first landing, within three yards of her. It was a cold winter evening, and the gas was burning as usual on the staircase. The passages were always kept very bright. Ethel paused, and the little figure turned its head towards her, and then vanished. It was almost as though she had been looking out for someone, but not Ethel. Ethel, like Lily, felt no fear or surprise at the time. She noticed particularly the gloriously bright golden hair.

This last appearance was seen but a few months back, and it has revived all our curiosity, wonder and interest. Whether we shall ever learn the truth concerning the little dead maiden, and whether the gold chain is in any way connected with her mysterious visits, must remain for the present a mystery.

BETTER SURE THAN SORRY.

I.

"I SHALL not tell you, then, and I wouldn't if you were to kill me!"

I almost laughed at this tragic outburst, but I was too angry. There lay the photograph on my friend's writing-table, and his sister (who also had hitherto been my very good friend) refused to tell me how he had come by it. Only a few days before, in this very room, I had confided my secret to my friend, Lewis Carden. I had told him that I loved my beautiful cousin, and that I hoped one day to hear her say my love was returned in no cousinly fashion. I had begged him to go with me to her father's house that he might see her for himself—and he had agreed to go "when he had time." Not by look or word had he given me to understand that he had any acquaintance with Mary Lyell. Yet here I found her photograph lying on his table, and his sister refusing to tell me how he had obtained it.

But for her excited manner I might not have pressed her further, once I saw her reluctance. But I felt convinced that some mystery hung round this photograph, and that mystery I was determined to solve.

"Janet," I said, gravely, and with an effort to appear indifferent, "you can avoid bringing a very serious unpleasantness between Lewis and me if you will only tell me how this picture came here. Lewis cannot possibly mind my knowing all about it."

"I shall not bring any unpleasantness between you if you make up your mind to leave it alone," she said, with a quaver in her voice which threatened tears.

"There are reasons why I cannot leave it alone," I responded. "My dear Janet, understand that. I must know this secret of yours, and if you do not tell me I must ask Lewis."

"Oh, Robert! don't do that. *Please* don't!" And now the tears were actually in her eyes.

Matters were getting worse. I pitied Janet, but every moment I grew angrier with Lewis, and more suspicious. I took up the picture again. Yes, there were the large, clear eyes, the wavy hair, the delicately formed mouth; all of which I had described to Lewis not a week ago. Perhaps my look softened as I gazed, for Janet took courage.

"Now, Robert, put it down, and tell me about the concert last night. Did Sims Reeves sing?"

"Oh, I can't stay now," I answered, hastily: "I have an engagement. Good-bye."

Once out of the house, and away from any soothing influence, I began to ponder the puzzle from a different standpoint. The facts were clear enough. Lewis must give an account of himself or must be prepared to relinquish my friendship. We had been chums at school and college, and our intimacy had continued up to the present time, when I was a junior partner in the firm of Lyell and Robinson, and Lewis Carden was supporting his mother and sisters by his pen.

The Cardens were very poor, and Lewis worked hard ; but I never knew exactly what he wrote or to what other pursuits he devoted himself. He always professed to be very busy. He was a clever fellow ; and we thought it was a pity that he was hampered by the care of his family ; but he was always cheerful and apparently contented. I think this was, partly at least, the effect of his pride ; for the Cardens were all proud. Not in an aggressive manner or consciously, but proud enough to keep even their most intimate friends in ignorance of their difficulties, if they had any. I was always longing to help my friend Lewis, but he never gave me a chance. Life might have been an earthly Paradise for all the complaint he made.

As I walked rapidly homewards, it occurred to me that Mary might herself clear up the mystery. I wondered why I had not thought of it before, and, jumping into a hansom, I drove to my cousin's house in Kensington. Mary was out, I found, but her mother received me cordially. I had every reason to suppose that Mrs. Lyell smiled upon my suit.

After the health of the two families had been satisfactorily disposed of, I proceeded to business.

"By the way, Aunt Rachel," I said, with an assumption of carelessness, "do you know a friend of mine, Lewis Carden?"

"I know his name very well. Was he not at Oxford with you?" she answered.

"He doesn't visit here?" I asked, with great, but well concealed, relief.

"Oh, no! But do bring him to see us if he would like to come. We should like to know him, I am sure."

"Thank you ; I don't think he goes out much. He's a hard-working fellow."

So the matter dropped, and I left the Lyells', feeling satisfied on one point. Mary did not know Lewis. But then—but then! how had her photograph come into his possession?

II.

I SHRANK from an interview with Lewis, much as I desired to solve the mystery that tormented me. Once I thought of writing to him, but I felt that that would be cowardly. At last I wrote him a note, saying that I wished very particularly to see him, and asking him to meet me at my club. He came at the time appointed, and seemed

to have no apprehension of any interruption to our friendship, looking and talking as he always did. It was difficult to begin, but I made a plunge.

"I went down to your place this morning," I said, with an effort to be free and easy.

"Oh; I was out all the morning. Did you see anyone? They didn't tell me you had called."

"I saw Janet," I said, and in spite of my efforts my voice was solemn.

"She didn't tell me," he repeated, and waited for me to go on.

"I wished to see you, Lewis, because I am sure you will explain something that gives me some uneasiness. Where did you see Mary Lyell?"

He looked up in astonishment. "Why, my dear fellow, I never had that pleasure. You offered yourself to introduce me, but you haven't done it yet."

"I saw her picture on your table this morning," I said, angrily. "Janet refused to tell me how it came there, but you shall not refuse. I must know all about it instantly."

Carden's face was crimson. At first I thought he was going to confess, but he only raised his eyes, as I went on declaring that he must tell me all, and said, quietly:

"Don't get excited, Robert. You won't get anything out of me that way."

"I am not excited," I cried; "but I have a right to know how that picture came into your hands, and I must know. Don't try my patience too far, Carden."

"Patience isn't just the word for you at this moment," he rejoined coolly, for I had now worked myself into a passion.

I was astonished. Until now I had never really believed that Lewis had acted treacherously towards me; but I could no longer doubt. My anger was subdued into a kind of fear as I realised that my old friend was dealing thus by me. "Lewis," I said, entreatingly, "tell me where you got that photograph, and I will forgive you all. You, and you alone, know how I stand with Mary Lyell. Surely you will not refuse to tell me where you ——"

"I will tell you *nothing*," he said. "You may think what you please. I never saw Miss Lyell in my life. You had better rest contented with that."

"You don't deny that it is her picture?"

"Certainly not, if you are satisfied that it is."

I felt that this was intended to throw me off the track. "Oh, I am satisfied as to *that*," I answered, bitterly.

"Then I had better say good-morning." He rose and took up his hat. But I could not bear to part from him in this way.

"Lewis," I said, sorrowfully, "is it all over between us? Do you know that you are treating me very badly?"

"I have done nothing of which I am ashamed," he answered, looking straight into my eyes as he spoke. Then he turned suddenly and left the room.

I sat for a long time looking into the fire, and trying to make some excuse for the strange conduct of my friend. He had always appeared to me to be the soul of honour and the ideal of generosity. His own words still rang in my ears, and all our previous intercourse bore testimony to their truth. It was, indeed, but a small part of the praise he had hitherto deserved to say that he had done nothing of which to be ashamed.

Nevertheless, who could help doubting now? I had confided in him my love for my cousin, Mary, and he had sympathised with me and wished me all success. He might have asked me to let him see her photograph—if he only wished to see it. There was not the slightest connection between the two families to suggest that Mary might have given her picture to Mrs. Carden or to Janet. Besides, why had Janet been so distressed at my discovery, and why did Lewis refuse to answer my question? No solution came to me, and, with a heavy heart, I went to my work in the City.

All through the day Lewis's face kept haunting me, till I almost felt as if I had wronged him in asking for any explanation. But again and again I reasoned from the facts that I knew, and every time I ended by saying to myself: "He ought to have been able to explain. He cannot have done what is right. There should be no mystery between us, especially about Mary."

I had as yet spoken no word of love to Mary, and, perhaps, I was all the more sensitive in regard to her, on that account. I was certainly hopeful, but that was all.

III.

I WAS engaged to dine that evening at the house of an old friend, and I knew that the Lyells would be there. As I dressed, I tried to think only of the pleasure of seeing Mary and talking to her—perhaps of sitting beside her at dinner. In this last hope I was, however, disappointed. Mary was taken in charge by a curate, who did not look as happy as he ought to have felt—at least, so I thought.

During the slow progress of dinner, I formed the resolve that I would tell my love to Mary on the next day; and, if she accepted me, I would forgive Lewis, and forget the whole affair. I hardly spoke to her that evening, but I walked part of the way home with her father, after we had put the ladies into the carriage, and I had the happiness of knowing that I had his full permission to win her if I could.

On looking back over this period of my life, I cannot understand how it was that I so utterly mistook my position towards Mary. I might have known that her frank preference for me was the worst sign she could have shown. However, I was not wise enough to know

this, and I was cruelly disappointed when she met my declaration of love with an impersonal sympathy, as though I had been speaking of another woman. She was kind, nay, almost tender in her manner, but she was quite decided.

"I have grown up with you, Robert. It would seem such a dreadful break in our pleasant old ways."

"It need break into nothing," I interposed eagerly. "I will do anything you like if you will only marry me."

"Ah, but that is just what I could never do. Let us be friends, Robert, dear, and forget that this has happened. I will if you will."

Of course the proposition seemed monstrous in my eyes, but I was forced to admit to myself that Mary was not for me. I am amused, now, as I remember the way in which she consoled me for my disappointment. She never avoided me, and never suffered me to avoid her, if chance threw us together. Gradually I began to see that she was right; and though to this day I love her dearly, I ceased to wish that she might become my wife. We were friends, but I could not forget what had passed between us. I could not forget her strength and patience and generosity.

I had not seen Lewis Carden for more than a month, when, late one afternoon, I called at the Lyells', and Mary said:

"Do you know, Robert, we met your great friend last night, and mamma has taken such a fancy to him. She has asked him to come and see us."

Mary knew nothing of my quarrel with Lewis, and I was now in a difficulty. I could not say that Lewis and I were no longer friends without telling the reason; and I felt that I had no right to tell that. Yet I could not but feel annoyed that they had become acquainted with him, under the circumstances. I was not yet quite resigned to my fate, and had a general feeling of bitterness against humanity, quite apart from my special dissatisfaction with Lewis.

"What did you think of him?" I asked.

"I thought he looked good. Indeed, I thought you had described him very well. We said it was odd that it was not through you we got to know him, you have so often talked about him to us."

This was hard to bear. To have my own words brought up against me in this way was a trial I had never anticipated. Yet often as I had told myself that I had given up Lewis, I could not say a word against him now. I took refuge in silence, and Mary changed the subject.

A few days after, I met Mrs. Lyell, and she was full of the praises of my friend. "I am going to introduce him to Mr. Lambert, the editor of the *Piccadilly Review*, you know. That will help him, won't it. I do so enjoy bringing clever people together."

I knew that what my old aunt enjoyed most of all was assisting her fellow-creatures in all sorts of indirect ways. But I very much

doubted if Lewis would accept of her assistance. He had always kept an insuperable barrier between himself and the world, where his difficulties lay. As time went on, I was told of no visit from him, and, after some weeks, I one day heard Mary say to her mother: "Mr. Carden has never come to see us, mother, dear. Don't you think he is very rude?"

"Very busy, probably," said her mother.

"Well, we won't urge him to come if he doesn't care about it. He can't possibly know how nice we are," said Mary, laughing. I was silent.

"Why do you never talk about Mr. Carden, now?" asked Mary, as she gave me a cup of tea.

"Don't I?" I answered, stupidly.

"You are always silent when we speak of him, and you never seem to go about with him as you used."

"I haven't seen him for a good while," I said. "To tell you the truth, there's a—misunderstanding between us. I think he has treated me badly."

"Oh, I am so sorry, Robert. Are you sure it is all his fault? A good friend is such a rare treasure."

"It is all his fault," I replied, gloomily.

"Do you mind telling me what he has done?" asked Mary, after a minute or two.

"I should mind very much. You would not like to know," I answered, rather shortly.

"Now you have roused my curiosity, and I *must* know. Without jesting, Robert, I don't like to hear of your losing Mr. Carden's friendship. Remember that I know of him only what you have told me, and I know nothing but good. Surely one would not give up such a friend for a slight reason."

What could I say? That Lewis had somehow obtained her photograph and refused to give any account of it? Mary would be indignant at the mention of such a thing. Yet I could not tell her anything without telling all. On the whole I found it easier to persist in refusing to disclose the cause of our estrangement than to say what would inevitably injure my quondam friend. So I told my cousin that I must decline to answer her questions, and left her under the impression that I was either unjust or harsh in my treatment of Lewis. But her words aroused in me a new longing to get to the bottom of the mystery, and to clear my friend from the undefined, but serious charge which I had myself laid upon him.

IV.

THESE weeks passed drearily enough. Nothing could be plainer to me than that Mary could never love me as I had hoped, and, for the time, there seemed no other hope left to me. But by degrees the cloud lifted, and I saw what a treasure I had in her steady,

sisterly affection, and realised that we were never meant to become man and wife. Mary never recurred to the subject of Lewis, and I only heard accidentally that he had dined with them. I happened to be unusually busy just then, and I afterwards went to Scotland for a short holiday. The day after I returned to London I called to see Mary.

"I am so glad you have come back," she said, with her own kindly smile. "We are leaving town in a few days, so we should not have seen you at all. We are going to Italy. Isn't that delightful?"

"Yes—for Italy," I answered. "Not for me."

"I want you to do me a favour before I go."

"It shall be done," I said, without suspicion.

"Ah, do not promise rashly. You know Mr. Carden has been here while you were away? We had the greatest difficulty in making him come, but I got papa to bring him at last. We have really gone out of our way to know him."

Here Mary stopped, but as I had nothing to say she went on with a little hesitation.

"I talked to him about you, and no one would have suspected that anything had come between you from the way in which he answered. He told me how you nursed that poor boy in Switzerland—you never told us! And what you did for the Lacys when their father died. Whatever he has done to vex you, Robert, he is your friend still, and I am sure he is worthy of you."

"You don't understand, Mary."

"I understand enough to make me long to bring you together again. Suppose we were to ask him here; would you meet him as if nothing had happened?"

"I could not. Oh, Mary, you would not talk like this if you knew all. Lewis could put everything straight if he would only tell me what I have a right to know. He will not tell me: how then can I trust him?"

"Give him one more chance."

"Let him answer my question to my satisfaction, and I shall never doubt him again. Till he does that, I can never call him friend."

"'Never' is a long word, Robert. But I can say no more," and Mary sighed as I got up to go.

"Tell me this, Mary," and I seized both her hands as I spoke. "Is it 'never' between you and me? Is there no chance for me?"

"Dear Robert, there is none. Pray don't imagine that there is a shadow of a chance. I am so sorry!"

"Oh, never mind!" was all I had intelligence enough to say. And I bade 'good-bye' to Mary for what seemed a long, long time.

They had been in Italy for six weeks, and had decided to remain a month longer, when I began to feel very lonely. I had few friends though I had many acquaintances; and of the two dearest friends I

had, one was in Rome, and the other farther apart from me than if an ocean lay between us. Mary's words kept coming back to me; and at last I determined to make one more effort to break down the barrier. I said to myself that I would offer to take back all that I had said, and trust Lewis in spite of appearances, not even asking him again about the photograph.

But my resolution was not, it seemed, to be carried out. An announcement, one morning, appeared in the papers that Lewis Carden had been appointed to the editorship of the *Piccadilly Review*; and everyone knew that the post was an excellent one. I could not, in the first moments of his prosperity, rush to him and demand his friendship on any terms. So I put it to myself, and I acted accordingly. But I was very lonely.

I watched with considerable interest the progress of Lewis's *Review*. I could recognise his own articles, and I knew that he would get on. Indeed, from the moment he took control, the tone of the publication was improved, and its standing soon became improved also. Lewis was at last succeeding. I was glad, and even proud, inconsistent as it may appear. Yet I made no attempt to see him, nor did I even write to him.

One morning, when I came down to my solitary meal, I found two letters waiting for me. One was a short note from Mary, and I opened it first. She merely said that they were returning to London, and that her mother hoped I would dine with them on the following evening. The other letter I had not looked at till I tore it open, and then, to my great surprise, I saw it was from Lewis. This was the letter:—

"MY DEAR ROBERT,—My circumstances have altered of late, and it has become possible for me to make an explanation which you had doubtless a right to ask, but which I found it impossible to give. I obtained the photograph of Miss Lyell from Seidlitz, the photographer, for whom I often coloured pictures, and who was kind enough to say that I did them well. This particular picture was, I believe, presented to Miss Lyell's godmother.

"Janet's entreaties have induced me to explain this to you, and I must add that it was in compliance with what she knew to be my desire that she refused to satisfy you. I have only to add my wishes for your happiness."

The curious mixture of pride and humour which made up this letter was Lewis all over. At the time I never thought of anything but my own stupidity. Since then I have wondered whether Lewis did not "treat me badly;" not because he had the photograph and would not account for his possession of it, but because he kept from me the bitter struggle he was carrying on with his poverty. But these thoughts came later. I went at once to his office, and took his hand with feelings of shame and penitence that would have softened

a far harder heart than his. We had much to say to each other as we sat by his fire. He told me of his hopes and plans for the *Review* and for his family, and I asked many questions. Then, with his hand on my shoulder, he said :

"And how goes the wooing? Am I to congratulate you yet?"

"Oh, that's all over long ago," I said, mournfully.

"Over? Why, I thought——"

"Thought what?"

"I almost thought it must be settled. Miss Lyell spoke a good deal of you to me——"

"That's just why it's all over," I replied. "She does talk about me—she wouldn't if we were engaged. She says we are friends, and I suppose we are."

"You had better wait and try again."

"No use. I shall never try again. Mary knows her own mind, and her friendship is worth having, if I can't have her love. I think I hardly mind now. I am beginning to see she was right."

I went to my work that day with a lighter heart than I had worn for some time. It was not the realisation of Lewis's innocence that I had, half-unconsciously, ceased to doubt, but the renewal of his friendship which made me so glad. One bit of satisfaction I determined to give myself: I would bring Lewis into Mary's presence and show her myself that we were reconciled.

My story draws to its close, for it is a story of friendship and not of love. But those who have followed this narrative so far will, perhaps, be interested to hear that my cousin Mary is now Mrs. Lewis Carden, and that in my no longer solitary home there rules a small and impetuous lady whom Mary calls her sister Janet, and who is my dearly loved and loving wife.

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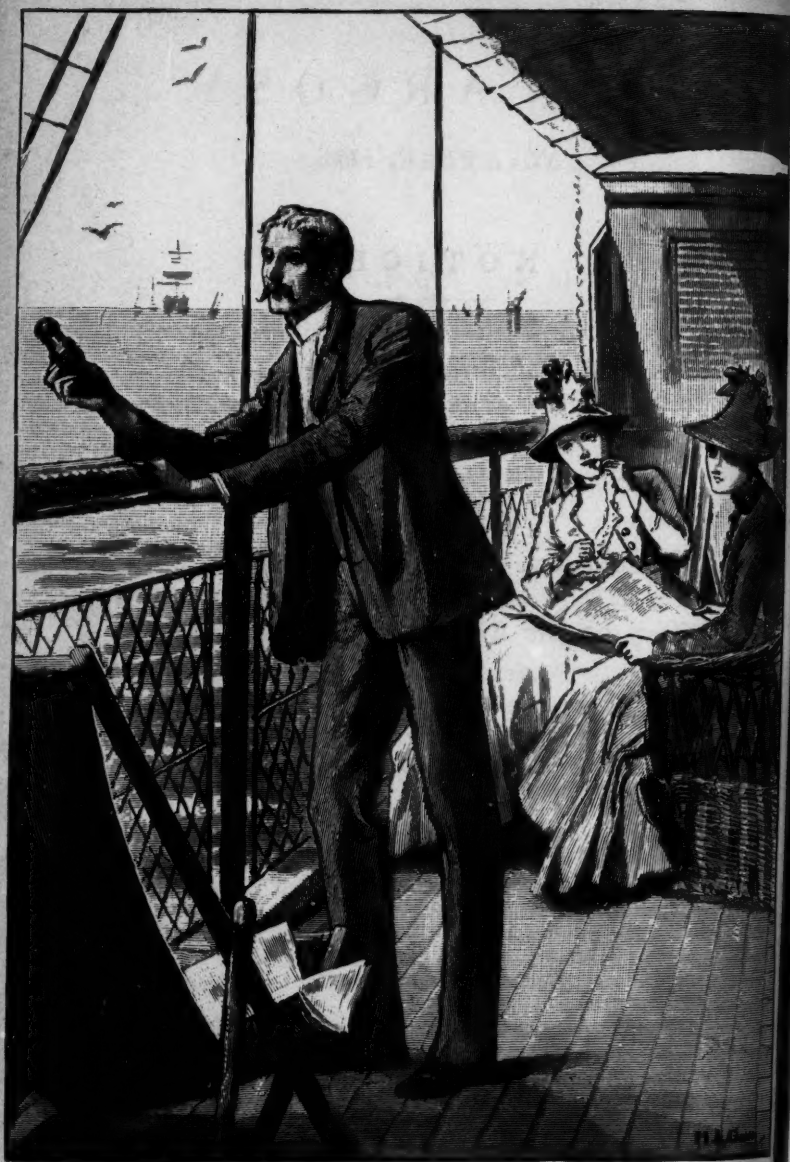
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M. L. GOW.

J. SWAIN.

HE TOOK OFF HIS HAT AND STOOD BAREHEADED IN THE BREEZE.